WORLDS OF POWER™

A novel based on the best-selling NINTENDO® game by CAPCOM®

BIONIC COMMANDO™

Book created by F.X. Nine

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SCHOLASTIC

The Pit of Peril

Jack looked at the floor. In front of him was an open pit with sharp spikes sticking up from its bottom. There was only one way across that pit. He'd have to swing out over it… and hope he didn't end up as a shish kebab.

Then something happened that gave him hope. A panel in the floor started moving back and forth over the spikes. This might be the break he needed.

Jack waited for the exact right second. Then he pointed his bionic arm upward, pushed a button, and shot out his grappling hook into the ceiling. THONK! Jack tugged on the rope hanging down from the hook. The hook held. Then, aiming for the shifting panel, Jack swung out over the pit.

Halfway across the pit, Jack looked down. Something was wrong, really wrong. The panel was moving away from him instead of toward him. Beneath his feet, the pit was yawning wide like the mouth of a famished monster. Only a few more seconds and he would be mincemeat!

WORLDS OF POWER

Book #7

by F. X. Nine

A new breed of hero!

A built-in secret weapon puts the power of an entire army in the hands of one soldier! A bionic arm lets him climb tall buildings — punch with the force of ten men — even melt steel! Only the Bionic Commando has what it takes to defeat treacherous villains who will stop at nothing to take over the world. The mission seems impossible — but there has never been a soldier like the Bionic Commando!

The complete story of the Nintendo® action-adventure game — with loads of game-solving hints throughout.

BIONIC COMMANDO

A novel based on the best-selling game by CAPCOM®

Book created by F.X. Nine

Written by J.B. Stamper

Story created by CAPCOM® and Eric Leinwand

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Dedicated to my bionic nephews, Ted & Dan

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Chapter 1

Jack Markson stood by the huge window of the Federation penthouse in Buenos Aires. He looked out at the setting sun, hovering over the rooftops of the city. He hadn't felt peace like this for months. Not since he'd started the mission against the Nazz.

Jack ran his hand through his short brown hair and thought back to the early hours of the day. Before sunrise, he and his partner, Super Joe, had burst into the hiding place of the Nazz terrorist organization.

The surprise raid had netted them every important Nazz leader. Only one thing had slipped through their hands — the plans for Albatros, a weapon of destruction so powerful that it could wipe out the world.

Jack turned around as Super Joe came through the penthouse door, carrying four boxes of hot pizza. He was still wearing his green commando uniform and looked like he needed a shower — bad.

“Looks like sunset for the Nazz, huh, Jack?” Joe said, looking out the window.

“Sure does,” Jack said. “I'm glad I'm not spending the night in that Argentine jail with them. It looked pretty grim.”

“They're getting what they deserve,” Joe said, opening up the pizza and starting to eat. “And we're getting what we deserve. This stuff is great.”

Jack sat down and joined him. Neither one of them had had a chance to eat all day.

Joe put his feet up on a glass table and looked around the room at the leather furniture, deep pile carpet, and full wall window.

“This sure beats a lot of places we've stayed in on missions,” he said.

“I don't know about that,” Jack said. “The prison in Bangkok

was real nice. So was that sewer pipe in Marseilles."

Joe laughed without stopping eating.

Jack let his mind wander back to the other horrible places he and Jack had spent time in on missions. They went back a long way together.

Ten years ago, they had met in Federation spy school as green recruits. Since then they had shared a lot of adventure. And a lot of danger. Through it all, Jack had learned to trust Joe. And there's nothing more important in the spy game than trust.

"How we going to explain to the Captain about Albatros?" Joe asked as he finished off his pizza.

"The Captain already knows," Jack answered. "I talked to him while you were gone. He's worried that some other power-hungry madman has gotten hold of the plans."

"You mean Kilt," Joe said grimly.

"Right," Jack said. "Generalissimo Kilt. Federation's top enemy. And the biggest maniac to ever threaten the free world."

Jack walked back to the window and thought about Kilt and his organization called Badd. They already had secret compounds established around the world. If they got their hands on Albatros, they could make a play for world domination.

"What about our next assignment?" Jack asked, thinking about the future. "Think it might be Kilt?"

Super Joe didn't answer. Jack turned around and saw that Joe was frozen in place. He seemed to be listening to something.

"What's the mat—" Jack started to ask. Then he sensed it, too. Danger.

"Get down!" Super Joe yelled, pulling Jack to the floor.

The agents flattened themselves into the thick carpet. Seconds later, two bullets whizzed over their heads, smashing a mirror across the room into a million pieces.

"You okay?" Joe asked without raising his head an inch from the carpet.

"Yeah," Jack answered, thinking what a perfect target he had made against the window. "I guess I owe you one, buddy."

“You owe me two, buddy,” Joe said. “Don't forget I saved you from that Nazz torture squad last week.”

“Listen, I paid that one back when I saved you from the Nazz thugs the next day,” Jack said. He started to grin in spite of their danger.

For years he and Joe had been keeping count.

Another pair of bullets blasted through the window, whistling by even closer to their heads.

“Those guys are good,” Joe said. “Real good.”

Jack knew that things were getting serious. His well-trained commando instincts were going off like fire alarms. Turning to look at the glass wall of the penthouse, he picked out four clean holes shot through the window.

“Snipers,” he said. “They've been watching us. You think they're alone?”

“No chance,” Joe answered. “I've got a gut feeling Kilt is behind this. And I'll bet our little vacation is over.”

Jack surveyed the room. His eyes spotted a safe place near a wall about twenty feet away. He wasn't going to stay here on the floor like a sitting duck for Badd's target practice.

“I'm running for cover,” Jack yelled. “Now!”

He sprung across the room like a panther, just beating two bullets to a wall opposite the doorway. Meanwhile, Joe dove behind a heavy brass sculpture.

“Are you thinking what I'm thinking?” Joe called out.

“I'm thinking we're going to get visitors soon,” Jack answered.

He reached over and flicked off a switch, killing the lights on the huge chandelier hanging over the entranceway.

For a long minute, the room was filled with dead silence. Jack felt his muscles tighten with tension. He didn't like being on the defensive like this. Who knew how many of Kilt's henchmen might burst through that door? Slowly, Jack pulled his gun from its holster on his chest.

Seconds later, the door to the penthouse slammed open. Five Ninjas dressed in black from head to toe jumped inside the room.

Jack saw the red eagles embroidered on their jackets. It was the symbol of Badd! The Ninjas advanced, their sharp-pronged *shurikens* glinting in their hands. The sharpened steel throwing star could kill a man in an instant.

From his hiding place, Jack took careful aim at the metal cord that held the glass chandelier from the ceiling. He fired.

Ten thousand crystals of glass crashed down on the Ninjas' heads. They fell to the floor unconscious. Their *shurikens* slid across the polished floor toward Jack and Joe.

“It's Badd all right,” Joe yelled to Jack.

“Hey, they may be bad, but we're worse,” Jack called back.

There was no time to laugh. Five more Ninjas jumped into the room. They marched over their fallen comrades, slicing the air with their swords.

Jack's commando instincts told him to use his gun. But his code of honor held him back. He would never fire a gun against an enemy first. Not even a Badd.

Jack searched the room for another weapon. On the wall behind him he saw a Ninja sword. Silently, he thanked the Federation decorator and grabbed the sword. Two of the Ninjas sprang toward him, their swords seeking his blood.

Jack centered his concentration in his sword, following what the Ninja masters at the Federation school had taught him. Then he slashed at the air in front of him, making the sword a blur of steel. Both Ninjas drew back in fear.

With graceful power, Jack thrust out his left foot in a karate kick and blasted away the sword of one Ninja, then stunned him with a chop on the neck.

The other Ninja lunged forward, driving his sword toward Jack's heart. Jack jumped aside and flipped the Ninja in the air, watching him crumble on the floor.

“Jack!”

It was Joe, calling him from across the room. He turned in time to see Joe heave the brass sculpture at two of the Ninjas attacking him. They sprawled back and fell, pinned down to the floor.

Jack started toward Joe to help him finish off the third Ninja. A sound at the door stopped them all in their tracks.

Ten more Ninjas sprang into the room wearing the red eagle on their black uniforms. They crouched in attack position like evil statues. Then a figure in black silk and leather strode through the door.

His black hair was combed off his low, bulging forehead. His red lips were curled in a sneer. His cold blue eyes cut like daggers into Jack's face.

It was Kilt.

“Capture them alive,” Kilt commanded in a cruel voice.

Five of the Ninjas sprang toward Jack. The other five lunged for Joe. Joe was caught off guard by the Ninja he was still fighting. He leapt away into the grip of a pair of giant Ninjas who pinned his arms behind his body. Three others unsheathed their swords and pointed them at Joe's throat.

A rush of adrenaline coursed through Jack's body as he saw Joe captured. He tried to move across the room to help Joe. But the five Ninjas coming toward him with their swords blocked his way.

Stealthily, like a cat, Jack crept toward the huge glass window. An idea was forming in his mind. A desperate idea, but all that he could think of. He knew he had to escape and get help for Joe.

Kilt's wicked laugh filled the air and mocked him.

“Give yourself up, Jack Markson,” Kilt sneered. “There's no way out this time. We are going to take you as our hostages. If the Federation tries to stop our plans, you will die.”

Jack looked over at Super Joe, trying to read his thoughts. Joe's eyes told him to escape, anyway he could.

Kilt ordered the Ninjas to capture Jack. They began to close in around him. One drew out a *shuriken* and pointed its sharpened steel. spikes at Jack's throat.

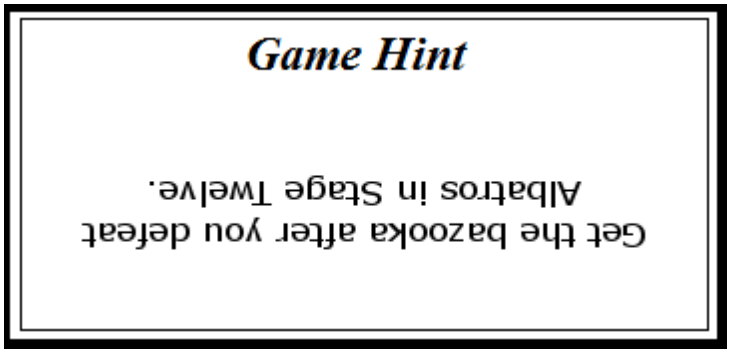
Jack looked over at Joe one last time, hoping he would understand. Then Jack sprang toward the glass wall with a cry like a wild animal. His body shattered the glass and flew through the

huge, gaping hole.

Jack felt the air rush out of his lungs as he spiraled toward the ground twenty floors below. His mind crept near panic as he thought of the small place he was aiming toward.

Looking up to the penthouse, he saw a Ninja standing at the broken window holding a *shuriken* in his hand. The last thing Jack saw was the Ninja's arm, flashing out.

Then all was darkness.



Chapter 2

Jack woke up in a strange room where everything was white and lit by bright lights. For a few seconds, he thought he had died. Then he heard a woman's voice.

“Doctor, he's awake.”

Slowly, Jack's mind struggled out of its haze of confusion. He tried to remember what had happened. He remembered breaking through the glass window. And falling, falling.

Jack shifted his body in the bed and felt a strange pain that he'd never known before.

“What happened to me?” he called out, feeling weak and helpless.

A young nurse with soft gray eyes came to stand over him. She smoothed down the sheet that lay across his chest and arms.

“You'll be all right,” she said. “Everything will be all right.”

“I remember falling,” Jack said, hoping that she wouldn't walk away again. “It was twenty floors to the ground. What happened to me?”

The nurse smiled, her eyes crinkling at the corners.

“You landed in the hotel swimming pool,” she said. “Fortunately, the deep end.”

A slow, crazy laugh rose from deep in Jack's throat. He remembered everything now. It had been a wild chance that he took, jumping out of the penthouse window. He had counted on falling into that swimming pool. And he had made it.

His laugh died in a choking sound as he remembered his last sight of Super Joe, surrounded by Kilt's Ninjas. He looked at the nurse, almost afraid to ask his question.

“My partner, Super Joe, where is he?”

The smile on the nurse's face faded, and she moved quickly away from the bed. A minute later, a doctor took her place,

looking down at Jack with worried eyes.

“I'm Doctor Tsuchiya,” he said. “We've called your Captain to come talk to you. Meanwhile, try to relax.”

A wave of anger washed over Jack. How could he relax when he didn't even know where he was? How could he relax when he didn't know if Joe was dead or alive?

“Doctor, I'm not some stupid kid you can pacify with a statement like that,” Jack said. “Tell me where I am!”

The doctor hesitated.

“You are in a top-secret army hospital in Maryland,” said a familiar voice. “You were flown here on a special jet after your fall.”

Jack struggled to sit up straight as he heard the Captain enter the room. But he lost his balance trying to put his weight on his right arm. His head fell back against the pillow as the Captain walked up to the bed. Jack tried to read his mood, but learned nothing from his steel blue gaze.

“Hello, sir. Good to see you again,” Jack said respectfully.

“Good to see you again, too, Jack,” the Captain answered with more warmth in his voice than usual. “I hear you've taken up diving since I saw you last.”

Jack grinned, mostly because he'd never heard the Captain tell a joke before. Then his smile disappeared as thoughts of Joe crowded back into his mind.

“Where's Super Joe, Captain?” Jack asked, hoping for a straight answer. “Kilt had taken him as a hostage the last time I saw him. I did everything I could to save him. At least I think I did. I don't know now. Maybe I should have stayed and fought…”

“Relax, Jack,” the Captain interrupted. “Super Joe is alive. Kilt is holding him as a prisoner at Badd's secret hideout in the Pacific.”

“I'm going there, as soon as I get out of this bed,” Jack said with his teeth gritted.

He threw the covers aside and tried again to lift himself up. His right arm still felt strange. For the first time, Joe looked down at it.

He felt a wave of shock followed by disbelief. His arm was gone! In its place was a finely molded piece of plastic.

“What did you do to me?” he shouted al the Captain in panic. “Where's my arm?”

The Captain stared at him with a steely gaze and didn't answer. Jack knew the Captain didn't like displays of irrational emotion in his spies. Well, that was tough! They had taken away his arm and replaced it with this fake. His career as a commando was over!

“Jack, listen to me,” the Captain said sternly. “You lost your arm in the fall in Buenos Aires. We think you were wounded by a *shuriken* we found at the bottom of the pool. Your arm was further damaged when you hit the water. We had no choice. We had to operate.”

Jack remembered the Ninja standing at the penthouse window with the *shuriken* in his hand. The *shuriken* must have hit him just before he blacked out.

Jack slowly raised the plastic arm in the air, studying it for the first time.

At first glance, it appeared to be real. The fingers and muscles looked just like those on his other arm. Jack ran the fingers of his left hand across the arm, feeling it respond to his touch.

“What is this thing, Captain?” he asked. He still felt repelled by the arm. But his horror was slowly giving way to curiosity.

“It's a bionic arm, Jack,” the Captain said with a tinge of pride in his voice. “Our scientists have been developing it in secret for years. I wish we could have asked your permission to give it to you, Jack. But time was important. And you were unconscious for days.”

Jack felt his emotions settle into the cool logic he knew a spy should display. He pressed his grief about his real arm farther and farther back into his mind.

“The arm is a powerful weapon, Jack,” the Captain said. “With it, you're the first bionic commando.”

Jack repeated the words to himself. Bionic commando. He didn't know what that meant yet. But it must mean that his career

as a Federation agent was not over yet.

Jack touched the arm again with his left hand and accidentally pressed the thumb against the palm. A metal grappling hook suddenly shot out from the plastic hand and clamped onto the ceiling above him.

Jack looked at the Captain in amazement.

“You'll find the hook helpful in getting out of tight situations,” the Captain said with a smile.

“Federation scientists will give you a special briefing on the arm in the next few days,” the Captain went on. “But, right now, let me give you a quick rundown on its capabilities.”

Jack watched and listened carefully as the Captain pointed out the secret triggers and activators on the arm.

“Activate this button and you can scramble electronic fields,” the Captain said, touching a small nub on the middle finger. “Very useful when trying to evade the enemy's monitoring devices.”

Jack thought of a few times he could have used that. Like the mission in Siberia when he was caught sending a message to Joe in Moscow.

“The index finger can be heated up to one thousand degrees Celsius,” the Captain went on. “At that temperature you can melt down almost anything that gets in your way.”

Jack pressed the activator the Captain had shown him. He stuck the index finger into a container of water by his bed. Instantly, it boiled away into steam.

“The arm itself has incredible strength,” the Captain went on. “It can punch with the force of ten men and throw objects with great accuracy and speed.”

Jack thought back to the penthouse fight in Buenos Aires. In his mind, he replayed the scene with the bionic arm, knocking out Kilt and his Ninjas and rescuing Joe.

“The arm has a few more little tricks,” the Captain said. “For instance, its fingers are ultrasensitive. You can use them to open safes or disarm bombs. But this is the little trick I like best.”

The Captain pressed down on the nail of the smallest finger. “I've just activated a special electromagnetic field,” he explained.

“If you point it at an enemy, he'll be compelled to tell you the truth.”

Jack felt a surge of anger and frustration boil up to the surface from deep within his mind. He raised the finger and pointed it at the Captain.

“Will it make you tell the truth, too, Captain?” he asked.

“Yes, Jack,” the Captain said grimly.

“What are Super Joe's chances of living?” Jack asked.

“Not good,” the Captain said. “He will only survive if your mission to rescue him is successful.”

“What are my chances of surviving the mission?” Jack asked, staring straight into the Captain's eyes.

“Slim,” the Captain answered. “It's a suicide mission.”

Chapter 3

For the next four weeks, Jack trained for his mission to rescue Joe. He began by building up his strength, working with weights and doing wind sprints. He practiced the martial arts with the Federation schoolmasters, slowly learning to move the bionic arm with the rhythm of his body.

He spent hours with Federation scientists and technicians, experimenting with the powers of the bionic arm. Finally the day came when he was called before the Captain for his final briefing.

Jack walked into the control center of Federation headquarters, a maze of blinking computer monitors and huge data banks. He strode into the Captain's large, book-lined office, feeling determined and strong.

“You can still back out, Jack,” the Captain said when he saw him. Jack met his steely gaze and held it.

“I'm ready for the mission, sir.”

“Good. In that case, we have a lot of work to do. We'll start with a map of the secret base in the Pacific where Albatros is hidden.”

The Captain spread out a detailed map on the table in front of them. It showed eighteen different zones of the Badd hideout, some on land and some on water.

“Most of these zones are heavily guarded by Kilt's soldiers,” the Captain explained. “You'll be parachuting into them from a chopper. Once inside, you'll establish contact with our double agents in place. They're all top agents, risking their lives just like you.”

Jack wanted to ask the Captain who else would be working with him on the mission. But he knew that kind of information was confidential. The less he knew, the less the enemy could torture out of him.

“What about the other zones?” Jack asked, turning back to the map.

“They're neutral zones. We don't know yet how much they've been infiltrated by Badd soldiers. But it's important that you don't fire your gun first in these zones. Repeat. Do not fire your gun first in the neutral zones.”

The Captain's instructions went on for the next four hours. Jack memorized every detail and every warning. Finally, the briefing was over.

Jack felt as though he couldn't wait another hour to get on with the mission.

“When do I leave?” he asked the Captain impatiently.

“Tomorrow morning,” the Captain answered briskly. “You'll be flown to the Pacific in a Federation supersonic transporter and dropped on a friendly base.”

“What happens then?” Jack asked.

“You'll find out tomorrow,” the Captain said with an air of mystery. “You're dismissed now.”

“Yes, sir,” Jack said, turning to go.

“And Jack,” the Captain called out as he started to leave the room.

Jack stopped and turned to face the Federation leader. He wondered what final order the Captain would give him.

“Take care of that arm, Jack,” the Captain said, eyeing the bionic arm. “You're replaceable. It's not.”

Jack boarded the supersonic transporter at dawn the next morning. As it lifted off, he took a final look at Federation headquarters, wondering if he'd ever see the place again.

Then he steeled his mind for the mission ahead. From now on, every move counted. Every second counted. He would have to react to danger situations like a well-programmed computer.

Jack looked down at his bionic arm and smiled at the irony. Part of him was a well-programmed computer. He had become familiar with each of the bionic arm's sensations and capabilities. But he still thought of it as a machine attached to his body. Not part of himself.

“Mr. Markson, your orders.”

Jack looked up at the Federation soldier standing beside him with a sealed black envelope. He took it and waited for the soldier to leave before opening it.

The envelope contained the specifications of the small helicopter he would use to fly to the enemy outpost. He studied its operation and control panel. Then he memorized the map that showed his route to Stage One of the mission.

Two hours later, Jack walked across the hot tarmac of the Federation's secret base on an obscure Pacific island. He felt beads of sweat gather on his forehead from the hot, tropical air. He climbed into the small helicopter waiting for him. It was painted in a camouflage blue-gray that would made it difficult to see in the sky or over water.

Jack felt a thrill of excitement as he started up the engine. The rotor above his head began to whirl in a smooth, steady hum. He pressed a button on the left side of the control panel, putting the copter into LIFT mode. Jack gave a whoop as the copter took off into the clear Pacific sky.

Once airborne, Jack punched the coordinates of his destination into the helicopter's computer. It was a fast little machine. Twenty minutes later, he recognized the configuration of the Badd secret outpost below him. He maneuvered the helicopter into position above Stage One.

“I know you're down there somewhere, Joe,” Jack said aloud, gazing at the grim buildings of the enemy's stronghold. “I'm coming to get you. And then we're going to wipe Kilt and his Badds off the face of the earth.”

Jack set the helicopter on AUTOPILOT and turned on the AUTOHOVER control. The helicopter would be waiting for him right here, hovering over the same spot when he came back… if he made it.

He checked the ammunition in his gun one final time, double-checked his parachute, and opened the escape hatch in the cockpit. Before he jumped, Jack looked down at the bionic arm.

“We're in this together, buddy,” he said. “You take care of me, and I'll take care of you.”

Jack jumped out into the wide, blue Pacific sky. His parachute

billowed out like a white cloud above him. Then he slowly drifted down into the fortress of the Badd empire.

Chapter 4

Jack's muscles tensed as the parachute dropped lower and lower into the enemy complex. He felt like an insect dangling from a spider's web. He hoped Kilt's soldiers didn't have him in their rifle sights.

Below him sat a five-story green building, built like a military installation. Jack remembered seeing it on the Captain's map. It was the communications building, his first destination in Stage One.

The drop seemed to be taking forever! Finally Jack's feet hit the ground with a thud. He fell into a crouch and gathered up the parachute, stuffing it into a deep hole in the ground.

Before moving, Jack checked out the area for possible sniper nests. The main building was at his back, and two metal towers soared up in front of it. In the distance, green palm trees waved in the tropical breeze.

Everything was quiet. Too quiet, Jack thought. He knew from experience that this kind of silence could mean death.

The gunfire started a few seconds later. Jack caught sight of ten Badd soldiers running from their hiding places, firing at him with semi-automatic weapons.

Jack took cover behind the metal towers and made a desperate run for the main building. He activated the grappling hook on his bionic arm just as a Badd commando blasted a round of ammo at him. The hook shot up and caught onto the ledge of the building’s second story. Jack swung himself up, inches ahead of the bullets whizzing around his body.

For a second, he looked down at the bionic arm in awe. It had saved his life already. A burst of gunfire to his left snapped him back to reality, Jack shot out the grappling hook onto the next ledge up, escaping a soldier running toward him with a bazooka.

He watched ten Badd soldiers run around in confusion on the ground below. They were having trouble following his rapid

vertical climb. Only two more stories and he'd be inside the communications center.

Jack shot the hook straight up and flipped onto the fourth story ledge. He came face to face with an amazed Badd soldier, struggling to reload his gun. Jack stunned him with a karate chop and then swung up to the top floor.

He crept toward the door of the communications center and slipped inside. Once he knew he was safe, Jack slumped against a wall. He wasn't as fit as he had hoped. The operation had taken a lot out of him. And

working the bionic arm wasn't easy yet.

But he was still alive and on his way to rescue Joe. That's all that mattered.

Jack studied the bank of blue screens and monitors covering one wall of the room. He reviewed the instructions the Captain had given him for using the communications center. Then he pulled out his red communicator and punched in the secret code for the Federation double agent in Stage One.

Jack stared at the monitors nervously and waited. It wasn't a good idea to have time to think. He started to worry about Joe and the mission. What if Joe had already been killed? What if the double agent had been captured and tortured? What if Kilt knew he was on the way and was waiting for his signal?

A monitor in front of Jack flickered for a second. Then a familiar face from Federation training school came on.

“This is MA–1,” the agent said. “Listen carefully to what I have to say, Jack. Many of our agents have already infiltrated the area. It is essential that you stay in communication with us. You won't survive unless you do.”

“I understand that,” Jack answered. “Have you seen Super Joe, MA–1?”

“Negative, Jack,” MA–1 answered. “But I know he's in the complex. And alive. You have to listen carefully to my instructions, Jack. Otherwise, you will never get close enough to Joe to save him.”

Jack had to bite back the words he wanted to say. Why did

MA–1 have the right to call the shots on this mission? He tried to remind himself of the Captain's orders: Obey the instructions of the agents in place.

“I'm listening MA–1,” he said.

“Before leaving the room, remember to eavesdrop on the enemy,” MA–1 said. “You will learn valuable information. Use it to plan your strategy for evading them.”

“Where do I go next?” Jack asked, anxious to get on with the mission.

“Go through the open door to the right of the control panel,” MA–1 ordered. “Ignore the dangers that you see. Your training and the bionic arm can get you through. And, remember, stay in touch with our agents at all times.”

The face of MA–1 faded from the monitor. Jack had a sudden impulse to forget everything he had said and follow his own instincts. Joe couldn't wait while he skipped from step to step in this mission.

Jack caught the reflection of his face in one of the monitors. It reminded him that he wasn't a kid anymore. He'd better stop thinking like one.

Jack punched the button on his communicator into EAVESDROP mode. He watched as the monitor dissolved into the face of a Badd officer with a three-day stubble on his chin. Jack caught the end of his conversation with another Badd leader.

“Beware of the elevator, Commander.”

The officer’s face was wiped out by interference. The monitor flickered for a few seconds and then dissolved into the threatening face of one of Kilt's top commanders.

“Now we have you,” he barked.

Jack didn't wait around to find out who he was talking about. He ran for the open door, climbed over the side of the building and started to rappel down the outside wall.

Halfway down, a Badd sniper spotted him. Jack knew he was in trouble. He had to find a short cut over to the next building.

Jack shot out his grappling hook onto a metal tower between the two buildings. He missed! The sniper took aim and fired. Jack

dodged the bullet just in time.

Again, he shot out his grappling hook. This time it held. He swung out over the four-story drop, hoping the Federation engineers had made a safe cable. Landing on top of the tower, he shot the hook onto a ledge on the next building.

Jack swung over to it and ran for cover inside. Ahead of him was an entrance to an elevator. He jumped inside, hoping for a quick escape.

Then, in a flash, he remembered the message on EAVESDROP mode. *Beware of the elevator!* Just before the door shut, Jack jumped out. Seconds later, a bomb ripped it apart.

The sound of Badd soldiers came pounding from behind him. Jack looked around in panic. There was an open elevator shaft where the bomb had gone off. He jumped down it just as the soldiers spotted him.

Suddenly, Jack was falling down a deep black hole. His mind flashed back to the fall in Buenos Aires. He felt himself start to go numb, just like he did before blacking out.

Then something worse happened. He forgot how to work the grappling hook on his bionic arm.

Game Hint

Get the machine gun from Destroyer Two in Stage Eighteen.

Chapter 5

THONK! The grappling hook shot through the air and bit into the side of the elevator shaft. Jack swung up onto a ledge and crouched there, feeling stunned. He wiped his sleeve across his wet forehead.

For a few seconds, while he had been falling, he'd forgotten how to use the bionic arm. Luckily, he'd remembered just in time.

Falling down the elevator shaft had been too much like falling out of the penthouse window. His mind still blacked out at the thought of it. If the Captain knew about this, he'd pull Jack off the mission in a minute!

Jack swung around and checked out the area beyond the ledge. It was a maze of dark passages lit by a greenish glow. Jack decided to contact agent MA–1 before he went any further. He pulled out his red communicator and pushed the SEND button.

“MA–1, come in.”

There was a crackle of interference. Then the voice of MA–1 came on.

“Get moving, Jack,” MA–1 ordered. “They know you're inside the building. Kilt has been alerted. You're going to have to think fast. Or they'll be throwing you in the ocean as shark food tonight. Over and out.”

“Thanks, MA–1,” Jack said, staring at the dead transmitter. “It's been great talking to you.”

He flicked into EAVESDROP mode, just to be safe. Kilt's voice came through the receiver, talking about Super Joe!

“The spy must know more than he's told us. Work him over another time. I want a list of every Federation agent from him. When I become dictator of the world, I will wipe out every spy whose name is on that list. Only then can I rest easy at night.”

Jack had a quick fantasy of what he would like to do to Kilt while he was resting at night. Poor Joe.

Jack couldn't stand to think about it anymore. He stuffed the communicator in a pocket of his combat vest and began to move down the passageway.

The sound of hard boots thundered on the steel floor nearby. Jack took cover behind a column and flattened his body against the damp wall. He waited. The sound of the boots came closer and closer. The enemy soldiers were running in tight formation toward him.

Jack knew he had to hold back until the very last second. He heard the first two soldiers come within inches of his hiding place. It sounded as though six more were right behind. Suddenly, Jack leapt out in front of them like a panther.

He drew back his bionic arm and punched it out with all his force. The first two soldiers reeled back as though they'd been hit by a tornado. They smashed into and knocked down the next two behind them. One by one, the eight soldiers fell like dominoes onto the floor.

Jack flexed his bionic arm and grinned. Not bad! After this mission was over, he might go into training. He'd always wanted to win the world heavyweight title.

Jack pulled out his gun and set it on STUN mode. Then he sprinted down the gloomy passageway toward the center of the building. Around a corner, he ran into two more Badd soldiers. Their eyes widened in surprise as they looked down the barrel of his gun.

Jack pulled the trigger twice, shooting a chemical dart into each of them. The soldiers slumped onto the floor for a siesta.

Just then, a siren went off, echoing through the building like a screaming bird of prey. Jack knew what all the excitement was about. Him. By now, Kilt probably had every soldier in the complex out for his head.

Jack rounded another corner and stopped short. A bizarre metal box that looked like a camera from outer space was floating in the narrow corridor in front of him. Jack didn't know what it was, but he figured it wasn't friendly.

An eerie red eye flashed in the center of its circuitry. Jack watched as the lens in the eye brought him into focus.

“Hey, I don't like having my picture taken,” Jack yelled.

He dove for the floor just before he heard the click. A grenade whizzed past his head and exploded at the end of the passage.

Jack pulled out his gun and flipped it into COMBAT mode. The box was pulling back and adjusting its lens to get him in range again. Jack took aim and squeezed the trigger.

The bullet smashed into the lens hole. A spray of red sparks flew out into the room. A direct hit!

The box let out an electronic whine that almost burst Jack's eardrums. Then it went into a blind fury, seeking revenge on the enemy who had shot out its eye.

Jack lunged away as the box banged into one wall and then ricocheted off another. Crouching low, he waited for an opening. Just as the box slammed into a corner, he sneaked past it.

Ahead was a hallway lit by bright yellow lights. Jack didn't like the looks of it. It might be a trap. Or Kilt's favorite torture chamber. But he didn't have much choice. The camera was banging its way toward him from behind.

Jack ran forward to a brightly lit room with a high vaulted ceiling. He fell into an attack stance, ready for anything. But there wasn't an enemy soldier in sight. For a second, Jack felt safe.

No such luck.

Heavy iron bars slammed down in front of him. Jack whirled around. Another set of bars crashed down behind him. It made a neat little cage. Jack looked at the bars and bared his teeth. All of a sudden he felt like a caged animal in Kilt's zoo.

Jack grabbed the bars with the fingers of his bionic arm and tried to pry them apart. Nothing happened. The bars were even stronger than the arm.

A hysterical laugh suddenly spread through the room. Jack looked up and saw that it was coming from loudspeakers in the ceiling.

“Welcome to my empire, Jack Markson,” Kilt's voice sneered.

Jack felt the skin on the back of his neck start to crawl. Kilt's voice reminded him of horror movies he had watched as a kid. Thoughts of torture chambers crowded into his mind.

“You were a fool to come here, Markson,” Kilt went on in a gloating voice. “Your friend Joe knows how strong the bars of our cages are. Now you two will die together.”

Jack tried to ignore Kilt's crazy threats. His eyes moved across every inch of the cage, looking for a way out.

“By the way, Jack,” Kilt went on. “We've caught your double agent in Stage One. He was a fool, too. Thinking he could trick me.”

Kilt let out another disgusting laugh that echoed against the walls of the room.

“You're a sicko, Kilt,” Jack yelled, feeling a rush of anger. He wondered how the Badds had caught MA–1. Maybe they had traced one of Jack's communications with him.

Jack felt a pang of guilt. This was the toughest part of being an agent. Knowing that somebody might have died because of you.

“Feeling claustrophobic yet, Markson?” Kilt's asked.

Jack looked around him. The bars on both sides of the cage were moving in toward his body. If he didn't get out of there fast, he'd be squashed like a mouse in a trap.

Chapter 6

Jack did a quick review of his options. He could try to melt down the bars with his bionic hot finger. But he might end up frying himself in the process. He could search the floor for a possible trapdoor, but time was too short if he failed to find one.

The best option seemed to be up. Jack shot his grappling hook into the vaulted ceiling above him. He didn't know what was up there. But it had to be better than being made into a sandwich.

Just as the bars started to squeeze against both sides of his body, Jack cleared the top of Kilt's cage. Dangling from the grappling hook with his feet pulled up, Jack searched the ceiling for someplace to go. Finally, he found it — a metal air duct just big enough to crawl through. He swung over to it, crawled inside, and then pulled himself through with the help of his grappling hook.

From below, he heard a burst of gunfire as soldiers ran into the room where they expected to find him squashed in the cage. He pulled himself through the duct faster and faster as he heard them scramble around in confusion. Then he heard a scream of anger from Kilt.

“Find him, you idiots!”

Jack turned a corner in the duct and suddenly found himself on a fast slide to nowhere. He shot along the metal pipe on a wild roller-coaster ride until he saw daylight at the bottom. Seconds later, he popped out into an alleyway between the two communications buildings.

Jack craned his neck to look up to the sky where his helicopter was hovering on AUTOPILOT. He had to get out of this place as soon as possible. But he'd have to find a higher spot to call to his chopper.

Whipping out his communicator, Jack turned it on to EAVESDROP. Maybe he could find out where Badd was looking for him. And head in the opposite direction.

“Red alert. Red alert.” It was the voice of a Badd commander.

He sounded desperate and nervous, like Kilt had just threatened his life.

"The Federation spy is in the alleyway. All troops converge on him there."

Jack couldn't believe it! They had tracked him already. He wondered if Kilt had spy cameras all over the complex and was watching for him on a hundred television screens. The idea gave Jack the creeps.

He flicked off the communicator, stuffed it in his jacket, and started running, moving so fast that the green walls on both sides of him looked like a blur of slime. He whipped around a corner and came to a total stop.

Disaster. The alley ended in a brick wall that soared up five stories to the top of the buildings. If ever there was a dead end, this was it!

Jack heard the sound of soldiers tramping down the alleyway after him. He'd never have time to use his grappling hook to get all the way up that wall. There wasn't a bit of cover in between. Kilt's soldiers could pick him off the wall like a fly.

There had to be some way out. He couldn't have gone through all this just to get caught by Kilt in the first stage of his mission! Jack trained his eyes on the reddish brick wall in front of him. Maybe, just maybe.

His sharp eyes found it. There was a narrow crack in the wall near the ground that might mean a secret opening. Jack spread out the five fingers of his bionic arm and lightly ran them over the surface of the wall. The sensitive index finger found it. A tiny trigger lock.

Badd soldiers had just rounded the corner. They fell to their knees in an attack position. Jack pressed the trigger on the lock. Chills ran down his spine as he heard the soldiers cock their guns.

The wall swung open like a revolving door. Jack jumped through it just as the bullets started to fly. One grazed his right leg as he dove to safety on the other side.

The opening in the wall snapped shut behind him. The Badds were yelling and firing at the wall in frustration. Jack could hear chunks of it shattering under their heavy firepower.

He looked down at his leg. Sticky dark red blood was seeping out through his green combat pants. But the pain wasn't bad.

He'd been hurt a lot worse than this on other missions. Once in Kenya he'd caught four bullets at the same time. And they had been meant for an elephant!

Jack ripped open the pants and saw that the bullet had just scraped off the skin on its way to somewhere else. He headed for a flight of stairs that led into the first communications building and ran for it. He could signal his chopper from the roof.

Jack bounded up the steps two at a time, wondering how he would ever get Joe out of here alive. Kilt's soldiers seemed to be everywhere. And Kilt now knew Jack was on a rescue mission. He'd probably keep Joe under tighter security than ever.

Jack felt warm blood running down his leg by the time he reached the top story of the building. On the wall by the staircase he saw a first aid kit and grabbed it.

Jack pushed open the hatch that led to the rooftop and jumped out, immediately signaling his helicopter. Two minutes later, the chopper was hovering over his head.

Just then, Kilt's voice boomed through the air from loudspeakers all over the complex. He sounded angry and out for blood.

“The spy's on the rooftop. If you let him escape, you will be punished!”

Jack shot his grappling hook, snapped it onto the helicopter's landing runners, and started pulling himself up. Badd soldiers burst out of the hatch onto the roof. They fell to their knees and started firing away.

Jack looked down into the barrels of their guns. He was dangling there like a target in a shooting gallery. He'd never be able to get inside the helicopter in time.

Kilt's voice shouted out through the loudspeakers.

“Don't let him escape! Shoot to kill!”

Chapter 7

Jack gripped the transmitter tightly in his right hand. He pushed down on the SPEED LIFT button.

WHOOOOOSH!

The chopper zoomed straight up like a spaceship into the blue sky. Jack's ears popped like firecrackers inside his head. He hit the HOVER button to stop the ascent and looked down.

Far below, the buildings of Stage One looked like toys. Soldiers scurried around on the rooftops, running around like nervous ants. Jack laughed down at them. They'd need ground-to-air missiles to reach him up here.

Then Jack's grin faded. He suddenly realized that he was dangling from a hook two thousand feet above the ground. And it was getting cold. The fingers on his right hand felt like frozen fish sticks.

Jack took a deep breath and swung himself up onto one of the chopper’s landing struts. Just when he thought he was safe, the copter tilted over at a crazy angle. Jack slid open the door to the cockpit and crawled inside. Breathing heavily, he collapsed into the pilot's seat.

For a few minutes, Jack did nothing but watch the fluffy white clouds float by outside. His emotions were flipping up and down from the pressure of the mission. There had been a couple close calls in Stage One. But at least he'd survived.

Jack ran his left hand across the bionic arm. If it hadn't been for the arm, he would have been dead about thirty seconds into the mission. He looked at the lifelike plastic, wishing it were his real arm. Too bad he couldn't have both — the bionic powers and his own flesh and blood. Jack wondered which he would take if

had the choice — the bionic arm or his real one. He wasn't sure.

Jack eased his mind back into the details of the mission. Time to get onto the next stage. He studied the map the Captain had

given him. His instincts told him to go for Stage Thirteen, a neutral village called San Genaro.

Jack punched its coordinates into the copter's computer, then flicked on AUTOPILOT. The aircraft zoomed off to the northeast toward Stage Thirteen.

Using the first aid kit he had picked up, Jack cleaned the gun wound on his leg. The stinging antibiotic hurt worse than the bullet had. The wound didn't look that bad, though.

Jack looked down at his dirty green commando uniform. He knew it would stick out like a sore thumb in neutral territory. He reached into the seat behind him for his undercover disguise.

Half an hour later, the copter was hovering over the neutral territory of San Genaro. Jack looked down at the bustling village sitting on the coast of the island. Behind it, snowcapped volcanic peaks poked up through the clouds. It looked like a great place for a vacation, Jack thought. But he wondered if Kilt's army was lurking behind those innocent-looking houses.

Jack switched the copter onto AUTOHOVER, checked his parachute, and jumped out into the sky over San Genaro.

He descended into the middle of a grove of orange trees that made him think of breakfast. Jack listened to his stomach growl and knew he'd have to find a restaurant fast. He stuffed his parachute behind a tree and quickly moved toward the village.

Ten minutes later, he ran a comb through his hair, straightened his jacket, and then casually walked through an alley into the main street of San Genaro.

Jack surveyed the buildings made of whitewashed stucco with thatched roofs. Some were draped with the flags of a neutral territory, but he knew that might just be a cover.

Tourists in loud clothes roamed the streets, looking for bargains. Jack congratulated himself on his choice of disguises. He fit right in with his bright plaid jacket, sunglasses, and a straw hat that shaded his face.

Through his dark glasses Jack saw a woman in a tour guide uniform marching toward him. She had hard black eyes and a mouth painted with blood red lipstick. Jack thought she looked like she might be Kilt's sister. He didn't trust her for one second.

“Welcome to San Genaro,” the woman said smoothly, giving him the once over with her eyes. “We are a peaceful village. And we stay that way because we have rules. If you use weapons here, you will be killed.”

Right, Jack thought, real peaceful. He shifted his bionic arm over the gun hidden under his plaid jacket.

He smiled at the woman and gave her a thumbs-up sign.

“I'm just here to eat,” he said, walking quickly away.

A cafe advertising THE BEST PIZZA IN THE WORLD stood a block away. Jack made a beeline for it. He hadn't eaten pizza since that night in Buenos Aires with Joe. The Federation cafeteria was a meat-and-potatoes place.

As he walked into the cafe, his eyes quickly surveyed the room. They came to rest on a young woman with jet black hair and intelligent green eyes. Their eyes met and locked together.

Jack casually walked by her and took a seat at the next table. He couldn't believe Heather Willis was here. She had started Federation spy school just as he was leaving. Since then she had climbed through the ranks to a high position in the espionage department. The Captain was going all out on this mission!

Jack ordered a pizza with everything on it. He watched as Heather busily pretended to write a postcard. When his pizza came, he leaned over to her table.

“Miss, could I borrow the salt?”

Heather's eyes flashed with a smile. She passed him the salt and palmed a note under it.

As Jack bit into his pizza, he read the note.

Look for flare bombs on the second story of the video arcade. You'll need them later.

Jack looked up at Heather and nodded slightly as she started to walk out of the restaurant. He would try to contact her later on the communicator.

As soon as Heather was gone, Jack began to wolf down the pizza. Somebody in San Genaro knew how to make a good pie. The flare bombs would have to wait.

Ten minutes later, Jack pushed open the door to the video arcade. Tourists stood in front of the flashing video screens, feeding tokens into the hungry machines.

“Need a tour of the town, mister?”

Jack looked down and saw a pint-size kid dressed in raggedy clothes. He looked like a beggar, but he had a million-dollar smile and a pair of hopeful eyes.

“Uh, thanks, kid. But I'm busy right now.”

Jack moved toward the far end of the video arcade where he saw a flight of steps in a shadowy corner. He noticed the boy was trailing along behind him.

“How about a shoe shine?” the boy asked.

“No, kid, really,” Jack said. “I'm in a hurry.”

The smile on the boy's face went out like a flashlight. He grabbed the sleeve of Jack's sportcoat.

“I can help you find your way around San Genaro,” he said. “I'm making money to buy a ticket to America.”

Jack looked down at the kid as he reached the staircase. He had no time to be a goodwill ambassador.

“See you, later, kid,” he said with a sharp edge in his voice.

“Promise?” the boy asked. “My name is Tiger.”

“I promise, Tiger,” Jack said. “Now get lost!”

Jack took the steps two at a time until he reached a door at the top of the staircase. He pushed it open and walked through. The door slammed shut behind him like the lid of a coffin.

Jack had expected to see more video games. Instead, the room looked like a scene from a nightmare. It had no windows and no other doors and was bathed in an eerie blue light.

Jack spotted flare bombs sitting on a ledge on the far side of the room. Then he looked down at the floor. Between him and the bombs was an open pit with sharp spikes sticking up from the bottom of it.

Jack was glad he'd finished that pizza. It might be his last meal.

Game Hint

Find the helmet in the tunnel
between Stages Fourteen and
Seventeen.

Chapter 8

Jack pulled off his plaid jacket and threw it on the floor. He flexed his bionic arm and felt for the grappling hook. There was only one way across that pit. He'd have to swing out over it… and hope he didn't end up as a shish kebab.

Jack crept up to the edge of the pit, staring at the rows of pointy spikes that covered it like hungry teeth. This was going to be tricky. The pit was at least thirty feet across. Jack figured it was too far to make it in one good swing.

Then something happened that gave him hope. A panel in the floor started moving back and forth, back and forth, over the spikes. This might be the break he needed.

Jack felt sweat break out all over his body. If he jumped too soon, or too late, he'd end up skewered. He had to time it just right.

Jack watched the panel slide back and forth for several minutes. At least it was predictable. It always took the same time to cover the same distance.

Jack tried to dredge up his faint memory of high school algebra. There was some kind of formula for a problem like this. Suddenly, he could see it written out on the chalkboard. He plugged in the numbers and made some quick calculations.

Jack waited for the exact right second, then he shot out his grappling hook onto the ceiling. THONK! Aiming for the shifting panel, Jack swung out over the pit.

Halfway across, Jack looked down and froze. Something was wrong. Really wrong. The panel was moving away from him instead of toward him. Beneath his feet, the pit was yawning wide like the mouth of a famished monster.

Desperately, Jack tried to lengthen his swing. His feet were coming down within inches of the steely spikes. Only a few more seconds and he would be mincemeat!

Just in time, the panel reversed directions and slid under Jack.

He collapsed on the metal plate and tried to figure out what he'd done wrong. All of a sudden, it came to him. That stupid formula! He'd divided instead of multiplied.

Jack reminded himself never to use algebra on a mission again. Then he looked over and saw the flare bombs sitting on a ledge ten feet away.

He shot out the grappling hook, leapt off the panel, and swung up to get them. Carefully, he picked up one of the explosives. The bomb was Federation-made. Jack had learned how to use this model in spy school. They blew up like a truckload of Roman candles.

There was only one problem. The bombs were also as sensitive as eggs.

Jack wished he had worn his combat jacket so he could stuff the bombs into the pockets. Anyway, he was beginning to shiver. The room seemed to be getting cold. Real cold! Jack looked down at the bombs and saw a glaze of ice forming on their black surface. What was going on?

He looked around and saw that slick ice was covering every surface in the room. The floor and walls looked like the inside of a huge refrigerator. Even the tips of the spikes in the pit glistened.

Jack couldn't believe it! If this was neutral territory, what would the rest of the stages be like? Kilt was really working his sick imagination overtime.

Jack stuffed the bombs inside his shirt and then shot the grappling hook onto the ceiling. It hit the icy surface and skidded off. Then the cold, cold truth hit Jack. The grappling hook was useless. He'd have to jump across the pit, back to the panel

Jack knew he had to move fast. His feet and legs were beginning to get stiff and frozen. He backed up and made a long running jump.

From the minute his feet left the ground, Jack knew it was a perfect jump. He landed in the middle of the panel, safe from the spike-filled pit. But the leather bottoms of his tourist shoes started sliding and didn't stop.

Jack slid out of control to the end of the icy panel, hugging the bombs against his chest.

Chapter 9

The sharp spikes were so close that Jack could see the jagged burrs on their sides. The thought of death made him think fast. There was something that could save him. The hot finger on the bionic arm!

Jack activated the button and pressed the finger against the freezing metal plate. There was a hiss of steam. The surface went from frozen ice to a hot griddle in seconds. Jack's uncontrolled slide stopped instantly. Then he frantically jumped up and down until the panel slid to a spot where he could jump off.

“This place is the pits!” he yelled.

He scrambled back to the door he had come through just a short time ago. Jack grabbed his plaid tourist jacket, stuffed the flare bombs into its pockets, and opened the door.

As he scrambled down the steps, he saw a small figure at the bottom of the stairway, waiting.

“I'm in a hurry, Tiger,” Jack barked as he ran past him into the video arcade. “Me, too, I want to go to America,” Tiger yelled over the beeping and buzzing of the video games.

Jack stopped in front of a game called American Commando. He decided to play the game as a cover while he got things straight with this kid.

“Listen, Tiger,” Jack said, feeding a token into the machine. “I'm on an important mission. I can't have you following me around like a puppy.”

Tiger watched in awe as Jack blew away one enemy after another on the video screen.

“You're really amazing!” Tiger exclaimed.

“I've had a little practice, kid,” Jack said, blowing away the last enemy tank. “Too bad it's not this easy in real life. Now scram. I've got work to do.”

Tiger started to protest. But he was too late. Jack had already

slipped through the crowd and out of sight.

“Captain, come in. It's Jack.”

Jack stood on the rooftop of the cafe where he had met Heather. The smell of cooking pizza floated up from an exhaust nearby.

Jack flicked the SEND button on his communicator again.

“Come in, Captain.”

The communicator crackled with static. Then the Captain's voice came on.

“How's the arm, Jack?”

“The arm's fine, Captain,” Jack answered. “In case you're interested, I'm okay, too.”

“Did you get the flare bombs?” the Captain asked.

“I've got them right here,” Jack said, patting the bulges in his jacket.

“Then proceed to Stage Four,” the Captain ordered. “You'll receive instructions from our agents there.”

“Captain, what have you heard about Super Joe?” Jack asked.

The only answer was static from the transmitter. The Captain had broken contact.

From his bird's-eye view, Jack took one more look around San Genaro. He saw Heather Willis walking toward the boat docks. Jack wondered if she was heading for another stage of the mission. He hoped he would see her again.

Heather had worked with him on a similar mission in Bolivia a few years ago. They were tracking down terrorists who had kidnapped an ambassador's daughter. Heather had gone undercover and rescued the girl in an operation that took both skill and guts. She was good.

Jack caught sight of Tiger roaming the streets near the docks,

looking for him, probably. The kid was determined, no doubt about it.

Jack knew he had to get on to the next stage of his mission. He radioed for his chopper. Seconds later, it was hovering above him, waiting like a chauffer-driven limo. Jack climbed up into the copter and took off, leaving the snowcapped mountains of San Genaro far behind.

The flight to Stage Four was due east, about one hour and twenty minutes. Jack punched in the coordinates and flicked the chopper on AUTOPILOT. He picked up the mission brief and started to read about Stage Four.

Before he got through page one, an alarm on the control panel went off in a fit of wild beeping. Jack knew that sound. It meant enemy aircraft were in the area. He flipped out of AUTOPILOT and took over the controls.

This was the part of flying Jack loved most. He had gone through special training as a chopper commando. He swung the aircraft around in a quick circle to check out the sky.

Ten Badd fighter planes were coming at him from the southwest! They were evil-looking black planes with the Badd eagle painted on their side in red. Jack prepared for evasive action.

Suddenly, the sky burst into a fireworks display of gunfire. Jack dodged and dipped in his chopper, outmaneuvering the ten planes as they fell out of their flight pattern and started to panic.

Four of the Badd planes nosedived into the ocean, shot down by bullets from other Badd planes. Jack decided he'd seen enough of their pathetic flying. He zoomed up in a speed lift, losing the rest of the planes in the clouds.

An hour later, Jack was dressed in his green commando uniform and parachute. He piloted the chopper into a descent over Stage Four, watching through binoculars. It was a small, kidney-shaped island covered with white sand. Jack saw no signs of life except a few birds of prey swoooping up and down along the edges of the beach.

The place made Jack nervous. Where were Kilt's soldiers? Why hadn't they tracked him here on radar? Was this a big trap he was walking into and never coming out of again?

Jack shoved his fears to the back of his mind and jumped out of the helicopter's hatch. He floated down into the dead silence of the island, landing on the soft, gritty sand.

Looking around, all Jack saw was a wasteland of beach, strewn with shells and driftwood. The bright sun shimmered off the sand, nearly blinding him. He walked to the edge of the water to look around.

Jack looked into the water in amazement. The beach ended in a sheer drop twenty or thirty feet down! Through the crystal clear water, he saw a grotto made of pink coral at the bottom of the sea floor.

That had to be it — the entry to Stage Four! Kilt's whole operation on the island was underground. And there was only one way to get to it. Under the water.

Jack looked down at his heavy combat boots. They would make him sink like a stone as soon as he hit the water. All he had to do was make it to that entrance. And hold his breath!

Jack looked up as he heard a vulture shriek in the sky above. He saw its beady eyes, sharp beak, and curved claws. Not a good omen. Jack wondered what it was hanging around for.

Then he took a deep breath and jumped. The boots dragged him to the bottom like magnets searching for the North Pole. Jack opened his eyes and investigated the bizarre underwater world. Everything was lit by an eerie green light that faded the deeper he went. Green and yellow seaweed pulled at him like slimy fingers as he passed by. Strange-looking tropical fish peered at him with bulging eyes and then darted away.

Finally, Jack reached the bottom of the sea floor. The coral entrance seemed to be only a few feet away. Jack felt the pressure beginning to build in his lungs. He had to get air soon. He pushed off with his legs toward the grotto.

Suddenly, the light above him was blotted out. Jack noticed that a dark shadow had fallen across the ocean floor. Eight long tentacles stretched out from its center.

Jack's heart started to pound. Slowly, he turned his head up and met the yellow eyes of a giant octopus.

Game Hint

You need at least three hundred bullets to get through Stages Six and Eight.

Chapter 10

Before Jack could move, the octopus swept its huge tentacles down in a stranglehold around his body. Jack squirmed in its slimy grip, wondering how long he could last without oxygen. He had to press his mouth shut to keep from screaming as the creature hugged him in a tighter grip.

Jack knew he had to keep the bionic arm free. As the octopus wrapped a tentacle around it, Jack jerked the arm back, ripping the tentacle out of the monster's body. One down, seven to go.

The octopus twisted in pain, then snaked its other tentacles around Jack like boa constrictors. Jack knew he didn't have long to survive. If he didn't get air soon, the octopus would be having him for lunch. And the vultures could finish off what was left for dessert.

He struggled to find the coral grotto through the murky water. It was his only chance. He shot out the grappling hook and hoped it would hit its target. Jack felt the hook snap onto a piece of coral and hold.

He started to reel in the line that attached him to the hook. He moved one, two, three, four feet toward the grotto. Then he came to a sudden stop. The octopus wouldn't let go.

Jack felt like a piece of rubber being pulled apart in a tug-of-war. He didn't know what would go first — his lungs or his arms. Accidentally, Jack squeezed the button for the grappling hook again. To his amazement, a second hook shot out and clamped onto the other side of the coral grotto.

He had a spare! The Captain had forgotten to tell him about it. Jack started to reel in both lines at the same time. Suddenly, he flew out of the octopus's tentacles like a stone out of a slingshot. His body shot through the grotto, up into a waterproof chamber closed off from the sea. He lay on the floor, breathing in huge gulps of air into his tortured lungs.

That had been close. Jack squeezed his eyes shut from the

pain in his chest. The pain reminded him of a mission he and Joe had been on in Thailand. They had followed a group of drug czars to a dock on the South China Sea. Five thugs who worked for the czars had caught them snooping and knocked them into the water. He and Joe had had to stay underwater and swim for the shore undetected. Afterward, the pain had felt just like this.

An image of Joe in Kilt's torture room flashed into Jack's nind. It made him sick to think what Joe might be going through right now. He had to move on with the mission!

Jack pulled his tired body up and surveyed the narrow underground passage that led from the chamber. A flickering blue-green light shone on the walls, making them look like a set for a horror movie. The surface of the walls was covered by an orange algae that Jack hoped he wouldn't have to touch.

After walking a few feet into the passageway, Jack suddenly jerked to a quick stop. Ahead of him lay a yawning pit filled with sharp spikes. Another one of Kilt's obstacle courses! Jack looked in disgust at the globs of green slime that glistened on the tops of the spikes. Sconge! The Federation had identified this as the most deadly poison an agent would ever face. Farther down the passageway he could see four more of the pits.

Jack was tired of playing hopscotch over pits — especially pits filled with Sconge. He decided to try a new approach with his two grappling hooks. Shooting one hook out and then the other, he swung like Tarzan across the ceiling. Jack pretended that the pits were the jaws of crocodiles waiting to catch him if he made a slip.

When he got to the end, Jack felt like giving an ape call, but he stopped himself. This place was a jungle, all right, and he didn't want to make the natives restless.

Jack ran down the hallway to the communications room. He pulled out his gun and set it on STUN before opening the door. There hadn't been any sign of Kilt's soldiers yet, unless you counted the octopus.

Were they waiting for him somewhere with a surprise party? Or had he slipped in undetected through the underwater grotto?

The communications room was empty except for a bank of flickering monitors and the control panel. Jack scanned the room

for bugs and hidden cameras. Then he activated the electronic field scrambler on his bionic arm, just to make sure the Badd's didn't pick up his signal. After hooking up his red communicator to a monitor, he took a chance. He made an ALL-CALL to Federation agents in the area — broadcasting a signal for help to anyone that might be listening.

“I read you, Jack,” a voice came in over the communicator.

Jack stared at the monitor in surprise. The face looking back at him belonged to the one and only Hal Hamilton! Hal had been his master teacher at Federation spy school.

For a minute, Jack was too stunned to respond. Hal was Federation's top spy master. Five times, he had been decorated for running operations that saved the free world from enemy domination. Jack took a deep breath and flicked on his SEND button.

“What are my orders, sir?”

“You needn't call me sir, Jack. We're in this together. Listen carefully to what I'm going to tell you. Super Joe has been moved to another area of the enemy complex. Before moving on, you must find a weapon called the wide gun in this building. It's similar to the RD–FF that we use in training — you can cover an entire room with stun bullets. You'll find that it comes in handy later on in the mission.”

“Do you know its location, sir?” Jack asked.

“No, Jack, that's part of your job in this stage.”

“I'm on my way,” Jack said. “Over and out.”

“Jack, wait,” Hal broke in. “Check your EAVESDROP mode before you leave the room.”

“Will do, Hal,” Jack said, “I'll contact you later.”

Jack didn't want to take the time to check EAVESDROP, but he knew Hal must be right. He flicked the communicator onto EAVESDROP mode, steeling his nerves for the sound of Kilt's voice.

The monitor flickered for a few seconds, then Kilt came on the screen. Jack studied the bloated face with disgust. Kilt's red lips were curled in their usual sneer. His blue eyes cut into Jack like chips of ice.

“I'm tired of these stupid delays,” Kilt screamed. “Albatros should have been finished weeks ago! You told me that you had the skill to complete the connections. Perhaps you have lied to me. Perhaps you are nothing but a Federation double agent sent to sabotage my plan to take over the world!”

Jack watched as Kilt's face turned purple with rage. It faded from the monitor as another face took its place. Jack controlled his urge to spit at the sickeningly familiar face.

It was the Hand.

Jack's mind flipped back through the hundreds of briefs he had read about this diabolical fiend. The Hand had served as deputy to a string of mad dictators all over the world. He always sold his services to the highest bidder, no matter what evil was involved.

The Hand seemed happy in his second-place position, feeding his masters' frenzy for power. And no matter how many times the Federation broke up the conspiracies, the Hand never got caught. He always stayed one step ahead of them.

Now he was here with Kilt. Jack vowed that this time, the Hand wouldn't escape.

“Kilt, you must learn to trust me,” the Hand said in an oily voice. “I have a plan to finish Albatros. And I will succeed. There is only one thing that might stop us. The Federation has sent its agent, Jack Markson, to rescue Super Joe. We must dispose of Super Joe before Markson finds him. Let me kill Super Joe now, Master. Why should we wait any longer?”

Kilt's face came back on, contorted with mad laughter. Jack felt like smashing the monitor with his bionic arm.

“You underestimate me, Hand,” Kilt said. “The spy Markson has no-chance against my soldiers. And I have special plans for taking care of Super Joe. A quick death is too good for him.”

Chapter 11

Jack couldn't stand to listen to one more word that came out of Kilt's mouth. He flicked off the communicator, gritting his teeth. Joe was probably going through the worst kind of torture a spy can endure. Kilt was the sort of sicko who would enjoy seeing his prisoners writhe in pain.

Jack tried to think of something positive, something that would give him the will to go on. Suddenly, he found it. Kilt's words had confirmed the most important piece of information of all. Super Joe was still alive.

Jack took stock of his situation. Somewhere in this revolting underground chamber of horrors was a weapon called the wide gun. He had to capture it before going on to the next stage. So he had better get a move on it!

The passage from the communications room led into a tunnel where the air was suddenly hot and humid. The algae on the walls was different here. It was purplish red and gave off a foul stench that reminded Jack of the sewers of Marseilles.

Wanting to get away from the smell as fast as possible, Jack broke into a run through the tunnel. Suddenly, his feet tripped over something on the floor, sending him sprawling. Jack picked himself up, tried to wipe the slime off his hands, and turned to look at what had made him trip. It was a pile of bones.

He picked up the largest bone to study it, wondering what animal would have been stupid enough to wander into this place. Then he dropped it in disgust. It was a human leg bone.

Feeling pretty stupid himself, Jack spun around to see what predators might be stalking him. Too late, he looked up.

Hovering over him and waving its sticky leaves was a giant plant that even a vegetarian wouldn't try to eat. Through the panic creeping into his brain, Jack recognized it as a huge Venus flytrap.

But Jack knew it wasn't looking for flies. It seemed to have him in mind for dinner.

The plant swooped down its sticky, lobelike leaves and scooped up his body like food onto a platter. Jack remembered watching flies die in these plants when he was a kid. It hadn't looked like a nice death then. And it didn't seem much better now.

Jack thought over what he had learned about plant warfare in spy school. Zip. The bionic arm was his only hope.

But it was stuck like the rest of his body in the gooey secretions of the plant. Jack guessed that the trap's mouth was watering from the idea of eating him.

Things got worse fast. The two halves of the plant started to close together like green jaws. Jack could see only a dim light through the huge bristles on the edges of the leaves. He was getting dizzy and nauseous from the horrible smell that the plant's chemicals were giving off.

It was a fight to stay awake. Jack told himself that he couldn't die this way. He wanted to go out with his gun blazing, throwing grenades at his killers. Now here he was, dying like an insect.

Jack blacked out. Then he came back. Just as he felt himself going under again, he remembered the hot finger. If he could just… stay awake… long enough… to push the activator.

Jack forced all his concentration onto the bionic arm. He pushed the HEAT button on his index finger and pumped its heat up to the max. Then he jabbed the finger as far as it would go into the plant's protoplasm.

There was a sickening rush of heat. The plant had caught on fire! All around Jack, the chemical goo began to smoke with noxious fumes. Jack felt himself start to cook like a marshmallow over a campfire. He had just made things worse! Now he was going to be cremated instead of digested!

The plant started to writhe in agony as its feelers turned red hot. Jack felt a sudden rush of air as the lobes opened up. A second later, he was flying through the air as the plant swayed in its death dance.

His body slammed into an algae-covered wall, then slid into a goo-covered, repulsive heap on the floor. Slowly, Jack picked himself up. He was pretty sure he was alive. Either that or he had died and been reincarnated as the Blob from Outer Space.

The plant was turning an ugly, charred green color and letting off disgusting smells as it died. Jack slunk away down the tunnel, hoping that it didn't have a mate waiting for him further on. Taking a quick look around, he saw the plant go up in flames like a jungle inferno.

The tunnel turned into a passage that was more like the kind of place Kilt's soldiers would hang out. Jack rounded a corner and sensed danger. Human danger. He flipped his gun into STUN mode and crept slowly forward.

His instincts had been right. A spray of enemy fire blasted out from behind a concrete bunker twenty feet in front of him. Jack pulled out one of the flare bombs from his commando jacket and tossed it at the bunker.

There was a blast and a glare of red light. Ten Badd soldiers jumped out of the bunker like frightened jack-in-the-boxes. They took one look at Jack's gooey orange body and started to scream.

Jack fired stun bullets into all but one of them. The nine victims slumped down in a trance, leaving one young, horrified soldier alone to face Jack.

“Take me to your leader,” Jack said as a joke. The kid probably thought he was a Martian. Well, he'd show him some outer-space stuff.

Jack raised his bionic arm and activated the electromagnetic field in the little finger. He pointed the truth ray at the terrified soldier.

“I want the wide gun,” Jack demanded. “Tell me where it is.”

A glazed look had come over the Badd soldier's face. He answered Jack in a robotlike voice.

“The wide gun is hidden in a safe behind the exit door. The safe is rigged with high-powered explosives. You must know the correct combination, or the safe will blow up.”

“That's nice to know. Now tell me the combination,” Jack ordered.

“Only Kilt. and the Hand know the combination,” the soldier said. “I am too lowly.”

“Well, I can't argue with that,” Jack said, shooting him with a

stun bullet.

He ran forward through the tunnel into a large room where three more pits of poisonous spikes stood between him and the exit door.

Jack swung across them, using his two hooks again. After climbing a final flight of stairs, he came to the exit of Stage Four. The safe was hidden behind the door, just as the soldier had said it would be. Jack smiled as he thought of the stories the kid would tell when he woke up.

Crouching down, Jack carefully began to turn the dial of the safe with the sensitive fingers of the bionic arm. Most safecrackers try to hear clicks as the tumblers in a lock fall in place. Jack felt for them.

The first click. Jack turned the dial slowly in the opposite direction. Another click. Back again the other way. The third click.

Jack tightened his fingers around the handle to the safe door. Just as he started to pull it open, he thought of something.

What if Kilt had rigged the combination to fool him? With gritted teeth, Jack pulled the door open.

Game Hint

Use the three-way gun from Stage Nine to get through Stage Seven.

Chapter 12

Jack pulled the wide gun out of the safe, glad to still be in one piece. He gave the overhead trapdoor a push with the bionic arm, and it swung up onto the gritty beach where he had landed. A vulture swooped down low as Jack climbed out, but flew away when Jack waved the wide gun at it.

“Go find Kilt,” he yelled and pulled out his communicator.

“Come in, Hal,” he said, hoping the Badds weren't tracing his signal. “It's Jack.”

“I hear you, Jack,” Hal said. “Did you get the gun?”

“I've got it right here,” Jack said. “And I'm ready to use it to free Joe.”

“It's not as simple as that, Jack,” Hal said. “You have to rendezvous with Heather Willis in Stage Fifteen next. She has your instructions from the Captain.”

“Okay, okay,” Jack said. “At least it'll give me a chance to get something to eat.”

“I gotta go, Jack,” Hal said tensely. “Somebody's coming down the —”

Jack broke contact, worrying that he might have drawn Kilt to Hal. Jack was taking a lot of chances on this mission, but at least he could keep moving. The double agents had to stay in place, hoping their cover didn't get blown.

Jack radioed up to the copter to leave Stage Four. Just before he climbed up into the cockpit, he dropped a few flare bombs down the exit door. He hoped Kilt's soldiers liked a good fireworks display.

An hour later, Jack walked into a small restaurant in the neutral zone of Stage Fifteen where Heather had arranged for them to meet. Straw hats and brightly colored ponchos decorated the walls.

“Mmmm, Mexican,” Jack said to himself, thinking about

starting with nachos covered with melted cheese.

The waiter took him over to a table for two in a quiet, dark corner. Heather Willis looked up and smiled, obviously happy to see him.

“We seem to spend a lot of time in restaurants,” she said.

“Not enough time for me,” Jack said, grabbing the menu. “Lately, it seems like things have been wanting to eat me. Now it's my turn.”

Heather laughed as he ordered nachos and cheese to start, followed by three plates of the Bandito Combo — everything on the menu in one platter.

“Aren't you going to eat, Heather?” Jack asked.

“Uh, no, Jack, you go ahead without me. I haven't had much of an appetite lately.” Jack watched as she sipped her coffee and then stared down at the table. Jack didn't say anything until she looked back up at him, her eyes brimming with tears.

“You're worried about Joe, aren't you?” he asked gently.

Heather nodded her head up and down and wiped away her tears with a napkin.

“Joe and I got very close on our last mission together,” Heather explained in a voice that wavered with emotion. “We made lots of plans for our future together. After Joe's mission in Buenos Aires, we were going to get married in New York City. You were supposed to be the best man.”

Jack had a memory flash of Joe standing in the penthouse in Buenos Aires, surrounded by Kilt's Ninjas. He wished he could rewind time and do that scene over. He should have tried to save Joe. He'd never forgive himself for leaving Joe alone there.

“Heather, I'm sorry,” Jack said, meeting her intense gaze. “I'll do all I can to rescue him.”

“You're the only one with a decent chance,” Heather said, staring at his bionic arm. “Only a bionic commando could get through Kilt's nightmare of mazes. I feel so helpless that I can't do more myself. I wish I had that arm.”

Jack felt self-conscious as Heather continued to stare at his bionic arm. He drew it off the table and put it on his lap, out of

sight.

“I hate this thing,” he said, surprised by his own feelings. “I haven't felt like a whole person since I lost my real arm.”

He knew he was a long way from accepting the bionic arm, and he might as well admit it to himself.

“Sorry, Jack, I never thought you'd feel that way,” Heather said, smiling gently. “The rest of us envy you for all the powers you have.”

Jack smiled back and activated the HEAT button on his index finger. He reached it out and lit a candle on the table, watching it burst into flame as the waiter brought his food.

“Bionic commando, at your service,” he said with a wry grin.

“Go ahead and eat,” Heather said, watching him eye his food. “You won't hear what I say until your stomach is full, anyway.”

Jack tried to be polite as he wolfed down the nachos, burritos, fajitas, and tacos. Heather tactfully looked the other way after the first few minutes.

“Okay, I'm full,” Jack said, washing away the heat of the food with a glass of ice water. “What awful place is the Captain sending me to next?”

“I spoke with the Captain just an hour ago,” Heather said. “He's sending you into Stage Five tonight. It's not going to be any fun, Jack.”

“This whole mission hasn't been my idea of a good time,” Jack said. “What's in Stage Five?”

Heather looked up as she heard the door to the restaurant open and close.

“I don't know, Jack,” she whispered. “The Captain likes to keep things close to his chest. My job is to direct you to Stage Five and give you this. You'll need it for the next part of the mission.”

Heather pulled out a small orange communicator from her bag and slipped it to Jack just as a familiar face appeared at their table.

“Mister Jack, where have you been?” Tiger asked, pulling up a chair at the table. “I've been wanting to talk to you. I've got a deal.”

Jack groaned and winked at Heather.

“Okay, Tiger, what's the deal?”

“I'll help you out on your mission, if you take me back to America with you,” Tiger said. “Simple as that.” He showed two rows of shiny white teeth and drummed his fingers impatiently on the table.

“Tiger, you don't know anything that could help me,” Jack said. “Now why don't I buy you an ice cream cone and then you can get lost.”

“Just try me,” Tiger said. “I've been inside lots of Kilt's command posts.”

“Sure, kid,” Jack said, taking out money to pay their bill.

“Honest, Mister Jack,” Tiger insisted. “You see, I work as a delivery boy for a Japanese restaurant. Kilt has a favorite kind of sushi — raw octopus. He gets a craving for it at all hours of the night. I've delivered the stuff to almost every stage in his complex.”

“Kilt and raw octopus — perfect together,” Heather said.

Jack pulled out a pen and pad from his jacket. He pushed it across the table to Tiger.

“Draw Stage Five, Tiger,” he said. “You got yourself a deal.”

Chapter 13

Jack waited until the black curtain of night fell over Stage Five to make his descent from the chopper. He'd spent an hour poring over Tiger's map of the installation. The kid had drawn two towers filled with horizontal ledges and trapdoors. Heather had been right. Stage Five didn't look like a whole lot of fun. He'd need all his strength and a lot of skill just to get through it alive.

His black parachute swooped down through the night sky like a giant bat. Jack landed noiselessly on the ground and crept toward the entrance Tiger had told him about.

In the shadows of the night, he saw it — a huge statue of Kilt sculpted from black marble. Jack shuddered at the idea of Kilt taking over the world.

Suddenly, Jack lost all fear for his own safety. All he cared about was destroying Kilt and rescuing Joe. The world wouldn't be worth living in with Kilt as its dictator, anyway.

Jack twisted a ring on the statue's hand, just as Tiger had told him to. Like magic, the statue moved forward, revealing an entrance to Stage Five. Jack slipped though just as the statue locked back into place.

A passage led to a tall, vertical shaft that Jack recognized from Tiger's map as the tower topped by a communications room. He had to get up to that room in order to contact the Federation double agent in charge of this sector.

Jack checked the wide gun in its holster across his back. It had enough power to knock out heavy artillery. He hoped he wouldn't need to use it.

Jack shot out his grappling hook and began his ascent from one ledge to another up toward the communications room. The swings were the trickiest he had made yet with the bionic arm. He was concentrating so hard on his momentum that he didn't see a Badd soldier guarding one of the ledges until he was right on top of him.

POW! Jack decked the soldier before he had time to even raise his gun. Jack stepped over his body and suddenly felt the floor drop out from under him. A trapdoor! He went into a free fall past the ledges he'd just worked so hard to climb. Finally he grappled onto one of them and began working his way back up.

Fifteen ledges and ten Badd soldiers later, Jack found himself inside the communications room. He flicked on his orange communicator, signaled his CALL code, and stared at the monitor, wondering whose face would show up

"Jack, glad to see you made it!"

"Hey, M–8, it's been a long time," Jack grinned at the face of his old buddy from a mission in Egypt. They had crossed a desert on a camel together and survived by eating mice and bugs. It didn't get much worse than that.

"You're here to find a rocket gun, Jack," M–8 said, suddenly very down-to-business. "It's near the exit at the top of the next tower. But be careful, Kilt's got some unmanned killer-copters guarding the area. They'll blow you away if you don't get them first."

"I hear you, M–8, thanks for the warning," Jack said.

He flicked his communicator into EAVESDROP mode and watched the monitor flicker from M–8's face to the pockmarked face of one of Kilt's commanders.

"The Federation spy has infiltrated Stage Five, Hand," he said.

Jack clenched his teeth as the Hand's slimy face appeared on the monitor.

"Call out the killer-copters," the Hand ordered. "Jack Markson must die now. Kilt is beginning to doubt my strategies. There must be no doubts. No hesitations. At last, the world will be in my power."

"Surely you mean in Kilt's power," the commander interrupted.

"Of course, that's exactly what I meant," the Hand snapped. "Kilt is the all-powerful."

Jack flicked off the communicator in disgust. He wished he could meet the Hand on one of the dark ledges and punch him into

tomorrow. But, for now, the Hand was in control, and Jack had to get moving — fast.

He ran from the communications room and began to ascend the next tower. The trapdoors were even trickier and Jack had to focus all his concentration on avoiding them.

Halfway up the tower, he heard the rhythmic beat of chopper blades coming toward him. Whipping out the wide gun from his back, he trained it on the black night above him. The killer-copters were flying without lights, probably using sensors to detect his body.

Jack pulled a flare bomb from his commando jacket and flung it up into the air. It burst into a blaze of light, illuminating four unmanned choppers all heading toward his hiding place.

Jack set the wide gun against his shoulder and fired off a round of ammunition into the sky. He listened as one, two, three, four choppers crashed down along the tower onto the concrete below. Then he quickly grappled up the remaining ledges to the communications room.

It didn't take long for him to find the rocket gun in another wall safe and carry it up to the rooftop.

Jack signaled to his chopper, waiting for him on AUTOPILOT. As he heard it whirl down to pick him up, the entire sky was suddenly flooded with the glare of searchlights. Jack stumbled forward, blinded by the powerful beams.

He heard the Hand's voice boom out from a loudspeaker and echo off the towers.

“Prepare to die, Markson. It's the end of the game for you.”

Jack gripped the rocket gun in his hands. He heard the whine of more killer-copters circling down around him. Swinging around in a circle, he blasted away with the rocket gun. He didn't even have time to look up. He fired his grappling hook straight into the air, hearing it snap on to the chopper's landing rails. He pulled himself up to the cockpit door.

Seconds later, the gas tanks of the killer-copters exploded into huge balls of fire. Flames were licking at Jack's heels as he slid into the pilot's seat and pushed the SPEED LIFT button.

Jack looked down at Stage Five through the window of his chopper, watching the wreckage below burn like a torch in the night. That had been a close one!

The exposed skin on his face and hands stung with flash burns from the exploding gas. The burns needed medical attention fast, and Jack knew where to get it.

Heather was a doctor as well as a first rate spy. Before they'd parted, she had instructed him to contact her in Stage Sixteen, another neutral zone, after the Stage Five mission was over.

Jack remembered the name of San Pedro, a village where the Federation had contacts. He punched its coordinates into his copter's computer, and put in a call to Heather.

He never saw the tiny metal half-inch screw that sliced through the bottom of the chopper as another gas tank exploded on the ground. He never felt the blow as it ricocheted off the control panel and struck him on the forehead, knocking him unconscious. He never heard the sound of Heather's voice as it crackled over the radio.

“Jack, can you hear me? Jack?”

Game Hint

The proper order to win is: 1, 13, 4,
15, 5, 16, 2, 3, 6, 14, 8, 9, 17, 7,
18, 10, 11, 12.

Chapter 14

“Jack, wake up. Jack, can you hear me?” Heather’s voice drifted through the haze of pain in Jack's mind. He opened his eyes and saw her face hovering above him. What a beautiful woman, he thought. Joe is a lucky man.

“Where am I?” Jack asked groggily.

“You're in a Federation safe house on San Pedro,” Heather said with a smile. “You must have blacked out just after you called me. Luckily, you'd already set the chopper on AUTOPILOT. Your ejection seat went off automatically, too. Your parachute landed in a tree and dangled there until I pulled you down.”

“Some bionic commando, huh?” Jack said with a painful grin.

“Hey, you survived Stage Five,” Heather said. “I called the Captain to let him know. He said the next six stages would be child's play in comparison.”

“The next six stages?” Jack asked with a groan. “I don't think…” Then he blacked out again as a wave of pain crashed over him.

“Mister Jack, Mister Jack, did my map help?”

Jack's eyes flew open at the sound of Tiger's voice. So Tiger was here, too. This kid never gave up!

“Your map was great, Tiger. You must have delivered a lot of raw octopus to Stage Five.”

“Just twice, Mister Jack,” Tiger said. “But I cased the joint while I was there.”

“You'll make a great spy someday, Tiger,” Jack said. “In fact, I may get you into Federation spy school after you graduate from college.”

“How long will that be?” Tiger asked impatiently.

“About ten, twelve years,” Jack said.

“You mean American kids have to go to school that long?” Tiger asked.

“Having second thoughts?” Jack asked with a grin.

“You must be feeling better, Jack,” Heather asked as she walked over to check on him. “You've been asleep for twenty hours now.”

Jack sat up on the bed and immediately noticed that the pain in his face and hands was gone.

“What happened to my burns?” he asked, shaking his head and looking in amazement at his healed skin.

“I used an ancient Chinese herbal ointment,” Heather explained. “It was something I learned during a mission to China. I got caught in a burning bamboo hut that had been firebombed by Andalusian revolutionaries. An old village woman dragged me to her house and nursed me back to life. She used the salve to heal the burns that covered sixty percent of my body.”

“She did a good job,” Jack said, admiring Heather's clear olive skin. Heather blushed when she caught his gaze and changed the subject.

“How’s your arm?” she asked. “I mean your bionic wonder.”

Jack ran his hand across the bionic arm to check it for damage. “It looks okay. Good thing, too. The Captain worries more about it than he does me.”

“I just finished talking to him, Jack,” Heather said. “He has a list of things he wants you to capture before you go on to rescue Joe. He says you can't destroy Kilt's empire without them.”

Jack jumped off the bed and started to pace the floor. He was getting fed up with the Captain's delays.

“Maybe he's wrong, Heather,” Jack said, his anger rising. “Maybe Joe can't wait for me to go chasing after all the Captain's gadgets.”

Jack saw a look of pain flash in Heather’s green eyes. He suddenly realized that she understood all too well what the delays

might mean. She cared just as much about Joe's safety as he did.

Jack swallowed the words in his mouth and gave Heather a quick hug.

“Give me the Captain's shopping list,” he said. “I'll try to get this over with as soon as I can.”

Heather handed him a sheet of paper with the Captain's instructions.

“These are the next six stages in the mission, Jack,” she explained. “Memorize everything on this paper. I'll destroy it as soon as you have it committed to memory.”

Jack looked over the list:

Stage Two	Super Joe's Good-luck Charm
Stage Three	Magazine of Ammunition
Stage Six	Electronic Permit for Entry
Stage Fourteen	Helmet
Stage Eight	Ninja Iron Boots/Blue Communicator
Stage Nine	Three-Way Gun

“Okay, I've got it,” he said, handing the list back to Heather. She took it over to the fireplace and threw it in, making sure the paper was totally consumed by the flames.

“When will I hear from you again, Jack?” Heather asked.

“I'll contact you at the end of Stage Nine,” Jack told her.

“Good luck, Mister Jack,” Tiger said as Jack pulled on his commando jacket and headed for the door.

“Any tips, Tiger?” Jack asked, stopping to look back.

“Be careful in Stage Nine,” Tiger said, his dark eyes looking troubled. “Last time I was there, I heard screams coming from the basement.”

Chapter 15

Jack parachuted down into Stage Nine, the last of the six sectors on the Captain's list. He had gone through the others in record time, collecting the things the Captain had ordered.

Jack hoped Stage Nine would go as quickly. He was getting anxious to see Joe. Anxious to know if he was still alive.

Jack landed, stripped off his parachute, and ran for cover near the building. So far, so good. Kilt didn't have any greeting party waiting for him.

Jack entered the building through a narrow passage that reeked with the smell of garbage. Stage Nine was the waste disposal sector of Kilt's empire. It gave a new meaning to the word *garbage*. Jack wondered if Kilt hung out here for the atmosphere.

Jack headed for his first destination, the communications room. He picked his way through the junk that littered the passageway — broken weapons, shards of glass, and shot-up tanks. The world would turn into one big garbage dump with Badd in power.

Jack stepped over a beat-up killer-copter into the communications room. Flipping out his blue communicator, he signaled an ALL CALL. Hal's face came on the monitor, looking grim.

“Report on your progress, Jack,” he ordered.

Jack took a deep breath. He'd been through a lot since leaving the Federation safe house in Stage Sixteen.

“I've gone through Stages Two, Three, Six, Fourteen, and Eight, sir,” he reported. “I've captured Joe's good-luck charm, the magazine of ammo, the electronic permit, the blue communicator, the helmet, and the Ninja iron boots.”

“How did it go, Jack?” Hal asked. “Were you injured?”

“I've dodged every kind of ammo you can think of, climbed over slippery poles, escaped blobs of slimy goo, and outsmarted at

least five hundred Badd soldiers," Jack said. "My muscles are sore, my brain is tired, and I want to find Super Joe NOW!"

"Take it easy, Jack, take it easy," Hal ordered. "You still have to find the three-way gun in Stage Nine. But you're getting closer to Joe. Kilt has been moving him around to confuse us. He was in Stage Nine just three hours ago."

Jack suddenly felt a flash of hope. He had begun to feel like he'd never see Joe again. These stages were wearing him down. But now a surge of energy pulsed through his body.

"Thanks, Hal, I needed to hear that. Do me a favor, will you? Contact Heather Willis and tell her I'm getting close."

"Right, Jack. Talk to you later."

The communicator went dead as Hal broke contact. Jack knew he should check EAVESDROP mode, but he didn't want to take the time. He wanted to get through Stage Nine as soon as possible and move on with the mission.

Jack ran out of the communications room down a dark passage. Thoughts of saving Joe crowded into his mind. All of a sudden, he was running on air and then falling.

It was a pit! He was falling into an evil-smelling pit. At the bottom of it, red flames licked up at him like hungry tongues. Tiger's warning about screams from the basement flashed into Jack's mind. But now it was too late. He was falling fast.

Jack started to choke on the poisonous fumes of the fire. He threw out his grappling hook and missed. He tried again. Missed! His skin began to sting from the heat. He was just a few feet from the inferno. Jack shot out the grappling hook one more time. It snapped onto a ledge and held.

Jack pulled his weary body up onto the ledge and looked down into the pit. He felt like screaming just thinking about falling into it.

Jack rested for a minute and steeled his nerves. He'd made a mistake — an almost fatal mistake. From now on he had to slow down and think clearly. In Stage Nine, haste made waste — of you.

Jack grappled over five more fire pits. Then he heard a loud rumbling behind him and whirled around in time to see a cart full

of garbage bouncing toward him. He jumped up and landed on top of the cart, riding it into the next room.

When he jumped off, five Badd soldiers crawled out of the passageways like cockroaches. One fired a bullet at his head before he had time to duck; the bullet bounced off the helmet he had got in Stage Fourteen, ricocheting back to where it had come from. Jack shot off a round of cover fire and then ran for the exit door of Stage Nine. He grabbed the three-way gun mounted on the wall there and radioed up to his chopper.

Back in the cockpit, Jack flew up to a safe altitude and checked out his new gun. The three-way gun had a barrel that shot straight, left and right, making it almost impossible for enemies to get near him. Satisfied that it was working properly, he then wolfed down the three hero sandwiches he had brought from San Pedro. He would always remember this mission every time he got hungry. As he swallowed the last bite, he put out a call to the Captain.

“Captain… it's Jack. Come in.”

The Captain's voice broke through the crackle of interference.

“I just heard from Hal that you made it through Stage Nine, Jack. Congratulations.”

“Thank you, sir,” Jack said.

“This could mean a silver medal for you, Jack,” the Captain said proudly.

Jack couldn't believe his ears. How could the Captain talk about decorations at a time like this! Super Joe was still in the hands of Kilt. And the minutes were ticking away.

“Captain, I want to go in for Super Joe now,” Jack said through clenched teeth. “Where is he?”

“Kilt has moved him from Stage Nine to Stage Seventeen, Jack,” the Captain said. “But we don't know if Joe is still there. Our double agent in Seventeen was captured and killed.”

Jack swallowed hard. He wondered which of his fellow agents had died to save Joe. Every spy knew that death was part of the game they played. But you always expected to beat it.

“One more thing, Jack” the Captain said. “Kilt has held back

till now because Albatros wasn't finished. We've just got some bad news. Albatros is now ready to destroy the world. The Hand found its inventor, the evil Master D, and forced him to make the final connections."

"Master D?" Jack asked. "Is that short for the maniac who calls himself Master Destructo?"

"Right, Jack," the Captain said. "We're dealing with a bunch of psychos here. Our only hope is that they destroy each other before they destroy the world."

"Captain, I've got to get moving," Jack said. "Over and out."

"Over and out, Jack," the Captain said. "And don't let anything happen to that bionic arm."

An hour later, Jack parachuted down into Stage Seventeen, pumped up for action. The three-way gun was strapped to his back. In his commando jacket he had flare bombs, the electronic permit, and the blue communicator. He drifted past the snowcapped mountains and treetops, landing near several huts in a neutral village.

Jack ran for cover against a wall and waited. He didn't look too neutral himself, but he figured Badd had probably taken control of the village.

His hunch was right. A Badd soldier walked by on a patrol but missed seeing him. Jack slipped inside the closest hut and came face to face with M–8, dressed as a Badd soldier.

"Joe's been moved to Stage Seven," M–8 said in a low voice. "And you've got to get out of here fast. Kilt just issued a reward for your body — dead or alive. There's a door against that far wall that leads into a tunnel. Follow it back to Stage Fourteen."

Just then, a blast of machine gun fire burst through the air. Twenty Badd commandos rushed into the hut. Jack grabbed M–8 and knocked him to the floor with a karate chop. It might hurt, but it would save M–8's cover.

Then Jack turned to look down the barrels of twenty guns.

Chapter 16

Jack's bionic arm was raised in a karate stance. Very slowly, he pressed the activator for the hot finger. A blast of heat shot out toward the Badd commandos. A second later, the soldiers felt the heat on their trigger fingers. They screamed and dropped their guns, shaking their burning fingers in the air. Jack made a run for the door to the tunnel and slammed it shut behind him.

Crumbling steps led down to a murky, underground corridor. Jack flicked on his high intensity flashlight and checked it out.

The tunnel was lined with old stones on the ceiling and sides. When Jack touched one of them, it fell down in chunks onto his face — along with a fat black spider. He brushed the spider off his body in disgust.

This place gave him the creeps. The whole thing looked like it could collapse into a pile of rubble. But there was no turning back.

Jack moved deeper into the tunnel, splashing through pools of water standing on the slimy floor. Black-furred rats scuttled across his feet and ran down the tunnel in front of him. Jack worried that they might alert the even bigger rats that could be ahead.

For twenty long minutes, Jack slogged through the endless tunnel. Finally he came to a place where another tunnel intersected the main one. He stopped to flash his light up the two corridors. Then he heard the sound of tramping feet echoing from both ends. It was Kilt's commandos, coming to find him in this underground death trap.

Jack flashed his light into the main tunnel ahead, hoping that the end might be in sight. But all he saw were the yellow eyes of rats reflecting back at him.

Jack broke into a run. He couldn't muffle the sound of his own heavy boots on the tunnel floor. He knew they would draw the Badds to him like vultures to rotting meat.

A bullet whizzed past his shoulder and smashed into the wall ahead of him. Jack dodged a huge chunk of stone that fell from the

ceiling, just missing his head.

Then the hard, cold truth hit him. This tunnel was going to be his grave. If the bullets didn't get him, the old stones would be broken up and bury him alive. He had to stop those bullets from blasting apart the tunnel in front of him.

Jack reached for a flare bomb in his commando jacket and tossed it behind him. In its red glare, he saw twenty Badd soldiers, toting semiautomatics. Jack pulled the three-way gun from his back and retreated a few yards further into the passage.

He had a plan. He would blast away a section of the tunnel to create a barrier between himself and the enemy. Then he could run ahead and find a way out of this place.

Jack turned around and fired off a round of ammunition into the ceiling and walls of the tunnel between him and the Badds.

Suddenly, it sounded like the whole earth was caving in. Stone after stone crumbled down in a shower of dust and rock that blockaded the tunnel. Jack jumped to the side as a horde of frenzied rats raced past him.

Jack looked at the pile of rubble and smiled. There was no way the Badds would get through that. Then suddenly he realized why the rats had been running. The stones in the ceiling hadn't stopped falling. Foot by foot, the whole tunnel was collapsing!

Jack turned and ran full speed, racing the rats over the slimy floor. He hoped the tunnel would come to an end before he did. A minute later it did — in a steel door!

Jack felt his blood run cold. The roar of the falling rock was building in his ears. He searched his commando jacket for the electronic permit he had found in Stage Six. Where had he put it?

He checked the right inside pocket. Nothing. He felt through the zippered pouch in the back. Nothing. Finally, he found it with Tiger’s map in his side pocket.

The dust from the crumbling stones was stinging his eyes and filling his lungs. Jack ran his bionic fingers over the steel door and found a slot. He pushed the electronic permit into it just as the rats caught up with him.

Nothing happened.

Get free "continues" by crashing the helicopter into the green trucks on the Map stage. You'll descend into an enemy level. After you defeat the men you''ll find white birds. These are the "continues."

Game Hint

Chapter 17

Jack jerked the permit out, turned it around, and stuck the other end into the slot. There was an electronic beep, and the door swung open just as the stone ceiling above Jack began to cave in. Jack dived through the door seconds before it slammed back shut.

Dazed and half blinded by the bright sunlight, Jack lay on the ground and gulped in the clean, fresh air. He was safe in Stage Fourteen, and just one step away from rescuing Joe.

Super Joe's face flashed through his mind. Then Heather's and Tiger's. They were all worth fighting for, even worth dying for.

Jack looked up into the blue sky, knowing that something was changing in him. He'd never cared about people this way before. On other missions, he'd wanted to prove his macho strength and skill. Now that didn't matter. All he wanted was to get Joe and Heather and Tiger out of this place — alive.

Jack sat up, his strength and determination restored. He radioed up for his chopper. With any luck, he'd see Super Joe within the hour.

“This is it,” Jack told himself. The big one. He was floating down into Stage Seven, checking out the heavily fortified installation. The buildings looked like armored tanks with spy towers hovering over them. Jack knew he wouldn't get far without Badd detecting him.

BAM! A shell exploded near his feet as he landed on the ground. Jack threw off his parachute, raised the three-way gun, and blew away-a killer-copter above him.

Badd wasn't wasting any time! Jack ran for a building, grappled up to a ledge, and took cover. He heard a strange rumbling sound behind him and whirled around. A one-man tank

was maneuvering toward him, its driver protected by a bulletproof shield.

Jack crippled it with the three-way gun and then grappled higher and higher up the building. More tanks came at him, but they were no match for his weapon. Kilt would need more than this to keep him away from Super Joe.

When Jack reached the top of the building, a horde of unmanned killer-copters buzzed toward him like angry wasps. He slammed the extra magazine of ammo into the three-way gun and blew them away, one by one.

Jack crouched behind a tower and pulled out his blue communicator. He gave a call for help.

“This is Jack. Help me find Super Joe,” he yelled into the transmitter.

Hal's voice barked out over the static. “Go across the poles to your left. Joe's in the command room. You're close, Jack. Really Close!”

Jack looked over and saw a perfectly straight row of flag poles, spaced more than thirty feet apart. The command room was on the top of the building on the other side of the poles. Jack fired out his grappling hook. It hit the top of the first pole and then slid off. He tried again and again but the hook wouldn't catch. A killer-copter swooped down, peppering the air with gunfire. Jack blasted it out of the air and then shot out his grappling hook again. This time it held.

He swung from pole to pole until he reached the top of the next building. He opened the door to the command room and jumped inside. As his feet hit the floor, a voice he despised boomed through a loudspeaker.

“You're a fool, Jack Markson!”

It was the Hand.

“You will never rescue Super Joe, you fool. You will die!”

Jack felt his heart freeze as he saw a huge robot coming across the room toward him. It pointed its right hand at him and shot out an electronic ray that sizzled through the air. Jack jumped aside and watched as the ray burned a hole in the wall. He aimed the

three-way gun and fired at the robot, but his bullets bounced off its metal body like rubber balls.

Now Jack knew why the Hand sounded so confident. The robot seemed indestructible. Suddenly, a smile of triumph crossed Jack's face. He remembered Heather's words. Only a bionic commando could save Super Joe. He pressed the ACTIVATOR button on his middle finger and pointed it at the robot. An electronic field shot out around the enemy, scrambling his circuits. The robot froze like a statue in a science-fiction museum.

Jack ran past it to a heavily barred door. He ripped it open with his bionic arm and ran inside.

Super Joe jumped up in surprise. His face was covered with bruises, but he was smiling when he saw Jack.

“Kilt told me you were dead,” he said, his voice shaky with emotion.

“I'm as alive as you are Joe,” Jack said. “Looks like we're a team again.”

Joe punched him on the shoulder and started to laugh. “Looks like I owe you one now. I was beginning to wonder if I'd ever get out of this place.”

“You haven't been keeping score correctly. Now we're even — and we're not out of here yet,” Jack said.

“That's for sure,” Joe said, his face drawing into a frown. “Kilt has finished Albatros with the help of Master D. They're planning to test it tonight — on the continent of North America.”

Jack looked at the watch on his bionic arm. “That means we have only about two hours. Do you have a plan?”

He looked up and saw that Joe was staring with curiosity at the bionic arm.

“I lost my real arm during that fall in Buenos Aires,” he told Joe. “The Federation doctors gave me this bionic one. I've gotten to appreciate it.”

Joe's face broke into a grin.

“So you're the bionic commando. Kilt has been going nuts about you.”

Jack laughed and raised his bionic arm in a fist.

“I thought Kilt was already nuts!” he said.

“He's a dangerous nut, Jack. We'd better split up and try to sabotage their plans before — it's too late. I'll head for Stage Twelve, Kilt's headquarters. You'll have to fly to Stage Eighteen and pick up my machine gun. We'll need it to knock out Albatros. Meet me in Stage Twelve after you contact the Captain.”

Jack reached for something in his pocket and handed it to Joe.

“Here's your good-luck charm. You might need it.”

Just then, the Hand's voice bellowed through the loudspeakers.

“The two spies must die!”

Jack and Joe ran from the cell and headed for two different exits in the control room. Jack took a last look at his friend.

Would he ever see Super Joe alive again?

Chapter 18

Jack swooped down in his chopper to circle the no man's land between Stages Eleven and Twelve. He had just come from Stage Eleven where he had captured the bulletproof vest. It was stashed in the back of the copter with Joe's machine gun. He had almost been killed trying to get that out of the Badd secret arsenal in Stage Eighteen.

The Captain had promised him that there would only be one stage left in the mission. Stage Twelve. Jack was on his way there. But he had an important pickup to make first.

Jack turned the copter in a tight circle over the thick green vegetation below. He strained his eyes to see two familiar figures waiting for him.

Frustrated, he circled the area again and again. All he saw was trees and bushes and an occasional tropical bird. There was no sign of Heather and Tiger.

Jack thought back to the end of Stage Eighteen, just after he had captured the machine gun. He had contacted Heather to tell her that Joe was alive and free. She had been so excited that she couldn't wait to see him. She begged Jack to take her with him in the helicopter to Stage Twelve.

Tiger had gotten in on the act, too. He'd promised to draw Jack a map of Badd headquarters and bring it along. Jack had agreed to pick them up in the no man's land on his way back from Stage Eleven.

The plan had sounded great at the time. Now Jack regretted it. Minute by precious minute was ticking away before Kilt activated the Albatros. Somewhere in Stage Twelve, Super Joe was waiting to meet him. And here he was, flying around in circles above the jungle.

It reminded him of a mission he and Joe had been on in Brazil. They were chasing a gang of revolutionaries through the Amazon jungle. He and Joe had ended up having a fistfight with

the enemy in two dugout canoes. Joe kept telling Jack not to fall in the water. Jack didn't know why until he knocked one of the bad guys overboard. The piranhas were hungry that day.

Jack snapped his mind back to the present. Suddenly, he saw a spot of red in the blur of green below. It was waving back and forth like a flag. He dropped the chopper down and hovered over the area.

The red spot grew bigger and bigger until he saw that it was Tiger, waving his red T-shirt. Heather was standing beside him waving both arms up to signal the helicopter.

“All right!” Jack said, grinning in spite of himself. He felt good seeing these two again, even if they were late.

The copter settled in a landing on the thick mat of jungle vines. Jack threw open the door as Tiger and Heather came running toward him.

“Hey, Mister Jack, where have you been?” Tiger asked, pulling on his shirt.

Jack started to say something. But he shut his mouth. Tiger's eyes were shining bright and he was waving his homemade map in his hand. Jack had to admit, the kid was a fighter, just like himself.

Heather jumped up into the chopper and settled on the backseat, carrying her medical bag and a communicator.

“Thanks for coming, Jack. I just have to be there at the end. No matter how everything turns out. I —” Her voice suddenly choked with emotion.

Jack reached back and squeezed her hand. Then he pulled Tiger into the chopper and slammed the door shut.

“Strap up, you two,” he said. “This copter's going to be breaking the speed limit.”

Jack punched in the Coordinates for Stage Twelve and then hit the SPEED LIFT button. The chopper zoomed off to the last stage of the mission.

Fifteen minutes later, Jack said good-bye to Heather and Tiger, leaving them in the chopper with instructions to escape if he didn't return by 1900 hours.

As his parachute floated down to Stage Twelve, Jack felt the

cold poison of fear creep through his body. Kilt would be crazy with revenge by now. He'd do anything to kill Jack and protect Albatros.

Jack drifted down past the top of the Badd headquarters. Hundreds of enemy flags flapped in the wind over rolls of barbed wire fence. Jack mowed them down in his mind and replaced them with his own flag.

The eerie silence of the compound was shattered by the loud thud of his Ninja iron boots hitting the ground.

The quiet didn't last long. A barrage of sniper bullets blasted from the ledges of the surrounding buildings. A few bounced off the bulletproof vest as Jack ran into a doorway for cover. With Joe's heavy-duty machine gun, he disabled four tanks that had started to chase him across the open ground.

Jack did a quick review of Tiger's map and then grappled his way to an elevator that would take him into the guts of the building. He pressed the DOWN button and rode four floors to a steel-lined corridor. Before walking into it, Jack slung the machine gun over his shoulder and pulled out his spy revolver, setting it on STUN.

The corridor was crawling with Kilt's elite guards. He picked off one after another as he worked his way to the end. They slumped into trances, not knowing what hit them.

The corridor dead ended into a wall. Jack searched it for a secret lever with his bionic hand. He found the catch, pulled on it, and walked through a doorway into the secret passage. Once inside, Jack flicked on his orange communicator, calling for help.

"Jack, this is Hal," a voice said. "Where are you?"

"In the passageway to the control room," Jack answered. "Have you heard from Super Joe?"

"Not for half an hour, Jack," Hal answered with an edge of worry in his voice. "Something strange is going on in the control room. Joe may be in there. I don't know for sure."

"I'm going in, right now," Jack said. He broke contact without waiting for Hal's reply.

Jack took the flight of stairs two at a time. They ended

abruptly in a steel door ten feet high. Jack examined it with his bionic hand but found nothing. There was no other choice. He'd have to use brute force.

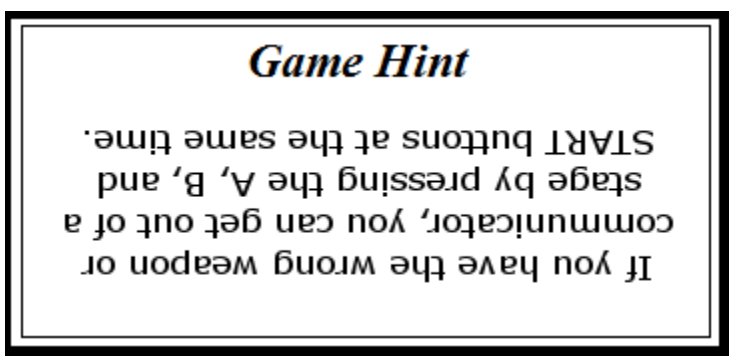
Jack hadn't used his Ninja powers for a long time. He closed his eyes and focused all his concentration into the Ninja iron boots on his feet. Then he unleashed his body in a karate kick that smashed down the door like it was a piece of bamboo.

Jack jumped through the doorway into the control room, ready to take on a battalion of Kilt's guards. But the huge room was empty except for a lone figure hunched over a coffin against the opposite wall.

Jack watched in horror as the figure raised up and turned to sneer at him.

“So… you've come to die, too, Jack Markson.”

It was the Hand.



Chapter 19

Jack stared at the Hand, paralyzed with fear. He didn't feel fear for himself. It was the coffin he was worried about. Was Super Joe's body inside?

The Hand saw Jack's eyes fixated on the huge black coffin decorated with a red eagle on its side. He let out a sickening laugh that echoed up into the high ceiling of the control room.

“You will be joining him soon, Markson,” the Hand said. “But not until you tell me about the other Federation spies who have infiltrated our empire. We know that there are double agents working with you. We've interrupted some of their communications. You will tell me their names before you die.”

Jack looked at the Hand's sinister, almost inhuman face. He'd go through any kind of torture to protect Heather and Hal and M–8 from this maniac. But had he come too late to help Super Joe? Jack wished he could run to the coffin to see the body inside. But the Hand was blocking his way. Jack knew better than to try to shoot — the Hand could have him killed with a wave of his hand.

“You're wrong about that, Hand,” Jack said with determination. “I'll never tell you their names. And I won't have to. Because you'll be destroyed along with the rest of Kilt's empire.”

The Hand laughed again, filling the huge room with echoes of his madness. He advanced toward Jack, shaking his fist in the air.

“It is too late for the Federation to stop us now, you fool. Albatros is completed! We had wasted days and weeks trying to solve its final riddle. Then I found the answer — the only way to finish the machine.

“I knew that Master Destructo alone held the key to Albatros's power source. I hunted him down through the jungles of Brazil and the slums of Columbia and the skyscrapers of New York. Then I brought him here to finish the machine he had devised for the Nazz empire.”

Jack watched as the Hand triumphantly pressed a button on

the control panel in the middle of the room. A huge black screen that Jack had thought was a wall lifted into the ceiling. Behind it sat an enormous, glowing instrument of destruction. The Albatros.

Jack stared up at it and felt dwarfed. He glanced down at his bionic arm. What could it do against this powerhouse of weaponry? Under a bright orange light on the top of Albatros were row after row of bazookas, rocket launchers, and every other weapon in Kilt's arsenal. The Albatros was a giant flying submarine, armed to the teeth and designed to destroy everything in its path.

“I see you are impressed,” the Hand said with a sneer. “You would be even more impressed to see us blow up North America tonight. But you won't be alive to enjoy it. Now let us proceed with our questioning.”

Jack jumped back as the Hand unleashed a steel whip with his right hand. It slashed through the air toward the bionic arm.

“Yes, Jack Markson, I know that you are the bionic commando,” the Hand said. “But I have my own weapons to combat your powers. They don't call me the Hand for nothing.”

With a fiendish laugh, he lashed out the whip toward Jack again. Jack sidestepped it and then pointed his hot finger straight out at the Hand. Before he could activate its button, the Hand's steel whip smashed into the finger, destroying its circuitry.

Jack reeled back, staring in horror at his crippled hand. The hot finger had saved him so many times in this mission. Now it was destroyed! In a flash, Jack knew that he had finally accepted the bionic arm. Losing part of it was like losing part of himself.

The Hand was advancing toward him again with a menacing look on his face. Jack shot out his grappling hook and tried to swing over the Hand's monstrous body. But the steel whip slashed out again, forcing him further back into a corner.

Jack pressed his body against the wall and wondered if Joe had died like this. He looked across the room at the black coffin where Joe's body lay. His eyes grew wide from what he saw. A head was lifting up over the edge of the coffin. And it wasn't Super Joe's! It was the head of Master Destructo.

Jack flicked his eyes back and forth from the Hand to

Destructo as the fiendish inventor stood up and then crawled out of the coffin. The Hand had no idea that the corpse had just awoken. He was grilling Jack with questions about the Federation agents.

As Master Destructo crept silently across the room to Hand, Jack remembered how he had joked with the Captain that the enemy might destroy themselves. From the look on Destructo's face, Jack guessed that he was out for revenge.

Ten feet away from the Hand, Master D pulled out a pistol from the pocket of his black jacket.

“I'll make you a deal, Hand,” Jack said nervously. “You tell me where Super Joe is… and I'll give you the names of the double agents.”

“I don't have to bargain with you,” the Hand snarled. “I don't have to bargain with anyone. Master Destructo found out who the real boss is here. He thought he could take my place as Kilt's military commander. But I showed him. He'll never wake up from the poison I slipped into his drink. Master Destructo has self-destructed!”

As the Hand broke into an insane laugh, Destructo jabbed the barrel of the gun into his enemy’s back. Jack watched as the Hand's face twisted into a look of terror.

“Yes, Hand, now you finally understand who the real boss is,” Master Destructo said through clenched teeth.

Jack jumped to the side as he heard the retort of Destructo's gun. The Hand fell forward into a dead heap on the floor. Jack looked at him and felt no pity. The Hand had died instantly. He would no longer cast his evil shadow across the free world.

Then Jack looked up and met the diabolical gaze of Master Destructo.

“You are next, Jack Markson,” he said, pointing his gun at Jack's chest. “But I have a more interesting death in mind for you. The Albatros needs to be warmed up before its attack tonight. You will make a perfect target.”

Destructo turned and ran toward the control panel. Jack shot out his grappling hook to catch him, but missed. As Master D pulled a huge switch on the panel, the orange light on top of

Albatros began to blink.

Destructo sneered at Jack and yelled as he fled the room, “You may have my coffin, Markson.”

Jack pulled Joe's machine gun from his back and slammed in a magazine of ammo.

The Albatros began its attack.

Chapter 20

Jack knew there was only one way to beat Albatros. He had to destroy its power supply before it destroyed him.

The machine didn't wait for Jack to figure out a strategy. It blasted out a barrage of gunfire from every barrel of its arsenal. Jack shot his grappling hook onto the ceiling and swung up before the bullets turned him into Swiss cheese. Then he pumped a round of ammo into Albatross, knocking out two bazookas along its right side. "Two down," Jack said to himself, "a hundred to go."

Albatros raised it sights up to him and blasted away again. Jack grappled across the ceiling, one step ahead of the bullets, and sprayed down a round of firepower at the rocket launchers along Albatros's flanks. One of the launchers burst into flame from a direct hit, searing Jack's feet with its intense heat.

Suddenly, Jack felt the ceiling lifting up and taking him with it. He released his grappling hook and dropped to the ground, watching the whole top of the command room slide open.

The sky above was streaked with the gold and pink hues of sunset. Jack thought of Heather and Tiger waiting high above Stage Twelve. Now he wished they were somewhere safe, far away from the range of Albatros's missiles.

There wasn't time to dwell on that problem. Albatros began to lift up out of the command room into the sky. Jack knew he couldn't stay on the ground like a sitting duck. He'd be bombed into that coffin in minutes.

Throwing up the grappling hook, he latched onto the side of Albatros as it rose above the compound. Jack picked off the cannons on its left side with the machine gun. Albatros whined like a giant insect, shuddered, and then attacked with all its remaining bazookas.

Jack reeled back from the shock of the guns' recoils. He almost slipped off the side of Albatros into the yawning pit of the command room below. But he regained control and slammed

another magazine of ammo into the machine gun.

Jack pounded Albatros with round after round of high-power explosives, jumping and grappling away from its guns. He figured he had knocked out half its firepower, but he couldn't go on like this much longer. Then he looked up and saw the huge orange light at the top of Albatros. It was blinking more slowly.

The power supply. That had to be it! Jack loaded his last magazine of ammunition into Joe's machine gun. He had one more chance to get Albatros. If he failed, the whole world would fall to the Badd empire.

Jack took careful aim and fired. His bullets smashed into the orange light, setting off a shower of sparks that sprayed out like lava from a volcano.

The giant machine shuddered, then began to fall. Jack threw his fist up into the air. He'd done it! He'd destroyed Albatros!

As Albatros hurled downward, Jack caught his grappling hook on a flagpole at the top of the roof. He pulled himself up and watched as it crashed into the floor of the control room and then melted down story after story until it hit the bottom of the building in a fiery inferno.

Jack's hands were shaking as he pulled the orange communicator from his commando jacket. Feelings of pride and exhaustion fought each other in his mind as he called Hal's signal.

"Jack, you did it!" Hal was almost screaming with excitement. Jack had to smile at the thought of Hal Hamilton, the calmest of the Federation spy masters, losing his cool.

"Hal, the Hand is dead," Jack said. "But Master Destructo and Kilt are still alive."

"I know that, Jack," Hal said. "I'm sitting on a ledge looking over Kilt's private helicopter pad right now. Destructo and Kilt have just climbed into the copter. You've got to stop them, Jack. Together, those two maniacs could build Albatros all over again."

"One problem, Hal," Jack said. "I'm out of ammo."

"There's a bazooka hidden on the edge of the rooftop, Jack. Try to get it before they fly away. What? No… don't push me —"

Jack stared at his communicator in horror as Hal's voice broke

off in a spurt of static. Then the contact went dead.

Jack saw it all in his mind's eye like a terrible nightmare. The Badd guard had crept up on Hal while he was talking to Jack. Just as Hal had sensed his presence, the guard had pushed him off the roof. His last words had been to Jack… desperate words for so great a man.

Jack fought back the lump that was rising in his throat. He remembered Hal at the Federation spy school, joking with the new recruits. He remembered Hal being decorated for his successful mission against the Karp Conspiracy. He remembered Hal giving him his first spy assignment in the field.

Jack snapped back to reality as he heard the roar of a helicopter's engine starting up. Kilt and Master D were beginning their getaway.

Jack ran to the edge of the roof to search for the bazooka Hal had told him about. He found it wedged in a corner of the building overlooking the helicopter pad.

"This one's going to be for you, Hal," he said, picking up the heavy weapon.

Then he climbed up on the edge of the roof and sighted Kilt's copter lifting up along the high walls of the headquarters compound. Dozens of guards swarmed around on the ground below. Jack knew that Kilt didn't care how maw of his men he left behind. Kilt was the big rat deserting a sinking ship.

Suddenly, the guards below starting pointing up and shouting. Jack knew they had spotted him. He grabbed the bazooka in his left hand and checked its ammo load. There was enough firepower to blow Kilt into outer space.

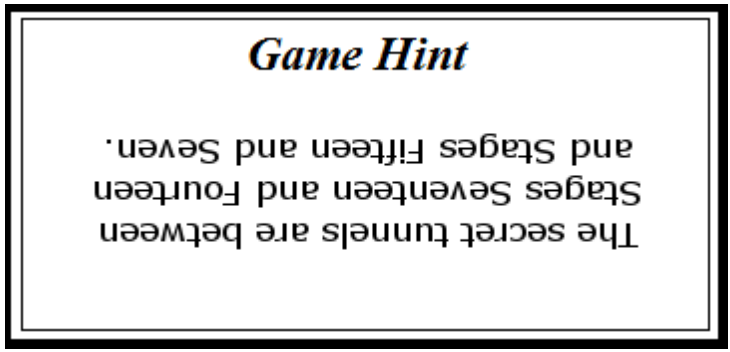
Jack knew he would be too late if he waited for the copter to climb to his level. The soldiers would be radioing Kilt about him right now. Jack jumped off the ledge in a free fall, waiting for the shot that would avenge Hal's death.

He dropped ten feet, then twenty, then fifty. When Kilt's copter was right in front of him, Jack opened fire.

BAM! The bazooka ripped a hole in the chopper's side near the gas tank. Jack saw a spark as he fell down toward the ground.

BOOM! The chopper exploded into a ball of fire that soared up into the twilight sky.

Jack caught the beauty of it just before he blacked out.



Chapter 21

When he came to, Jack found himself dangling from a ledge one story above the ground. That had been a close one! Somehow, just before he blacked out, he must have activated the bionic arm's grappling hook.

The wail of a siren blasted through the headquarters followed by a series of loud, electronic beeps that almost shattered Jack's eardrums. It sounded like the end of the world.

Below him, Jack saw hundreds of Kilt's soldiers running around like frantic insects. He found out why a second later. Kilt's voice boomed out from loudspeakers throughout the complex.

“Comrades, I have ordered this tape to be played in the event of my death. Without me, the Badd empire cannot live on. I do not want any second-rate commander taking over my troops and my dreams. Kilt alone will be remembered as the leader of Badd!”

“I have made sure that none of you will disobey my wishes. When this tape ends, it will activate a secret control. That control is connected to a self-destruct mechanism.

“Comrades, I am taking you with me through death's door. You have sixty seconds to prepare yourself to die. Farewell!”

Jack felt panic wash over him as Kilt began to count down the seconds to destruction. He had less than a minute to make it back to the helicopter before he was blown to pieces with the rest of Kilt's empire.

And worst of all, he had no idea where Super Joe was. How could he ever find him in this huge complex in sixty seconds? Jack felt a sick feeling rising in his stomach.

Kilt was dead. Master Destructo and the Hand were dead. The Badd empire would soon be blown to smithereens. But none of that mattered if he didn't find Super Joe in time.

Jack tried to calm his thoughts. He remembered what Hal had taught them in spy school. In emergencies, there was always one rule to follow. Rendezvous at the escape point.

Jack knew that was all he could do. He just hoped Super Joe would be up there waiting for him.

Kilt was counting down the seconds to destruction with mad glee. "*Fifty-two… fifty-one…*"

Jack started to grapple back up the building, story by story. He had dropped the bazooka when he blacked out. Now all he had to protect himself was the bionic arm. But he didn't even need it.

Badd soldiers he came near were only worried about saving themselves. They didn't seem to care anymore that he was the bionic commando who had blown away their leader. They were scrambling for helicopters, too.

"*Forty… thirty-nine…*"

Jack tried to shut out Kilt's voice from his mind. He didn't want it to be the last thing he heard before he died.

"*Thirty-seven… thirty-six…*"

Now Jack was one story away from the top of the building. He threw out his grappling hook and swung up onto the roof.

"*Thirty-two… thirty-one…*"

Jack searched every inch of the rooftop. No Super Joe! He pulled out his communicator and radioed to Heather in the helicopter.

"Heather, don't waste a second. Bring the copter down to the rooftop of the main headquarters building. Tiger will tell you which one it is."

"Jack, I've heard from Joe," Heather screamed over the communicator. "He's locked in a cell in the second story of the main building. Tiger says there's a door on the roof that opens up to a flight of stairs. They'll take you to Joe!"

"I've only got twenty-five seconds, Heather," Jack shouted back. "This place is going to be blown sky-high. Don't let yourself and Tiger get blown away with it!"

"Hurry, Jack," Heather said and broke contact.

Jack quickly found the trapdoor on the roof and tore it off with his bionic arm. He counted the seconds as he ran down three stories of steps to the second floor. It took seven seconds to get

down. And it would take at least seven seconds to get back up!

"Joe!" he screamed as he hit the second floor and opened the door of the stairwell. "Where are you?"

Jack heard a faint voice answer him off to the left side of the hallway. He rushed into a huge room filled with three tiers of cells. Joe stood by the bars of a ground floor cell, guarded by two of Kilt's soldiers. They pointed their guns at Jack and started to fire.

"I don't have time for this!" Jack yelled, ducking their bullets and then punching them with his bionic arm.

Over the loudspeaker, Kilt was still counting down.

"*Fourteen… thirteen…"*

Jack ripped off the door of Joe's cell and yelled, "Follow me."

The two commandos raced each other up the stairs and onto the rooftop.

"*Six… five…"*

The copter was hovering ten feet above the roof waiting for them. Jack snapped his grappling hook onto its landing struts and grabbed Joe. He pulled them both up onto the copter pads and screamed to Heather.

"Speed lift. Now!"

Kilt's voice broke into a mad cackle as he made the final countdown.

"*Two… one…* Destruction!"

Jack looked down as the Badd empire went up in an inferno of flames that looked like an explosion on the sun. It was over. All over.

Kilt and his henchmen would never curse the face of the earth again. And Heather and Tiger and Joe were safe.

Jack looked over at Super Joe, his face lit by the red glare of the fire below. Joe caught his gaze and grinned.

"Hey, buddy, I owe you one," he said.

Jack thought back over the mission and all its death traps and near escapes. He knew he would do it all over again if he had to.

"You owe me two, Joe… at least two," Jack answered back.

The helicopter flew off to a safe base in free territory, leaving behind a trail of laughter in the twilight sky.

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